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ABSTRACT

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) was created in 1993 to collect and disseminate information about high-quality resources for parents. One of the services provided by NPIN is "Parent News," an Internet magazine that focuses on topics of interest to parents and to professionals who work with parents. Compiled in response to requests for a publication that would introduce those without Internet access to the activities and information available through NPIN, this "Best of" sourcebook provides and "offline" collection of education, parenting, child development, and family life information. Following descriptions of NPIN and of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, the sourcebook is divided into four sections paralleling the sections in the Internet version. Articles in the "Feature Articles" section cover topics including work and family; brain development in young children, early education for special needs children, technology and the family, talking to children about sexuality and AIDS. Articles in the "Community Spotlights" section explore topics including the strength of family literacy, home visiting, and grandparent programs. Articles in the "Of Interest" section discuss topics such as building resilience in children, adolescence and gender issues, living in a stepfamily, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Following a brief description of the authors of the Parent News articles, the sourcebook concludes with full-text copies of ERIC digests produced by clearinghouses in the ERIC (Educational Resource Information Center) system. These digests

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explore topics such as spanking; kindergarten entrance age; bullying in schools; the risks of rewards; homeschooling gifted students; and standardized testing in the schools. (HTH)

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The Best of *Parent News*

A Sourcebook on Parenting from the National Parent Information Network

http://npin.org

Compiled by Anne S. Robertson

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
and the National Parent Information Network

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What Should Parents Know about Standardized Testing in Schools?

Introduction

Parenting has become an increasingly complex process for our generation. Many parents now live far from extended family members who traditionally provided information and support for parenting questions or concerns. At the same time that families have become more mobile, most public schools have changed from predominantly small community hubs to educational campuses that may be located miles from the student's family and home. Parents who coordinate parenting in two-job households struggle with child care arrangements, scheduling dilemmas, and how to be involved in their children's education.

In spite of their best efforts to stay involved with their children's schools, today's parents may feel disconnected from local schools and community resources. They may not know who to ask about concerns related to their child's development, behavior, or education. While parents are inundated with parenting and education-related information in all kinds of media, all too often that advice is conflicting or is not based on research. Increasingly, parents access Web sites to seek information on child development and family life, and use electronic mail to ask parenting questions of experts.

The ERIC system has been responsive to parents' growing need for access to education and parenting information through production of materials directly for parents and people who work to support families. The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) was created in late 1993 to collect and disseminate information about high-quality resources for parents. First established as a "gopher" site in late 1993, NPIN became a World Wide Web site in 1994 and is now one of the two or three largest noncommercial collections of parenting information on the Internet. In addition to its Web site, NPIN offers question-answering services via a toll-free telephone number and by email through the AskERIC service.

One of the services provided by the National Parent Information Network is *Parent News,* an Internet magazine that focuses on topics of interest to parents and professionals who work with parents. Many of the articles in *Parent News* have been developed in direct response to frequently asked questions from parents or in response to issues raised on our PARENTING-L Internet discussion list.

The Best of Parent News: A Sourcebook on Parenting from the National Parent Information Network has been compiled in response to requests for a publication that would introduce those without Internet access to the activities and information available through the National Parent Information Network. This book provides an "offline" collection of education, parenting, child development, and family life information that will be of interest to parents and those who work with parents.

Arranged in sections similar to those found in the Internet version of *Parent News, The Best of Parent News* includes "Feature Articles," "Community Spotlights," "Of Interest," and "ERIC Digests." Some articles have been edited for this offline format. As with our Internet version of *Parent News,* we encourage you to share the resources that you find helpful with parenting groups, schools, and community development initiatives.

We hope you will visit the National Parent Information Network Web site at:

http://npin.org

or contact NPIN at 800-583-4135.

The National Parent Information Network

The ERIC Clearinghouses on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE) and on Urban Education (ERIC/CUE) invite you to join them on the National Parent Information Network (NPIN), an Internet-based information network and service for parents, organizations, and individuals who support parents in raising and educating their children.

What Is NPIN?

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) finds and shares high-quality materials related to parenting and parent involvement in education. The focus is on creating an attractive, widely available resource collection that incorporates graphics and other parent-friendly features of the Internet. NPIN:

- provides an attractive, single point of access on the World Wide Web to high-quality information on parenting and parent involvement in their children's education;
- continually adds new information to its already broad collection for parents and those who work with parents; and
- trains parents and parenting professionals in the skills needed to use NPIN and other World Wide Web resources.

For parents . . . NPIN offers easy access to high-quality information on raising healthy children and on becoming informed partners in their children's education.

For organizations . . . NPIN provides research-based information that can be incorporated with local resources on parenting and on how parents can be actively involved in their children's learning—at home, at school, and in their communities.

What Does NPIN Do?

Since 1993, NPIN has been developing one of the largest collections of high-quality, noncommercial information on the Internet on parenting, child development, and family life. The U.S. Department of Education, through the National Library of Education, supports the National Parent Information Network through the ERIC program.

NPIN provides the following services:

PARENT NEWS — An award-winning Internet source of news for parents on child rearing and education, *Parent News* is updated every 2 months and includes feature articles; listings and descriptions of parenting-related organizations, newsletters, books, and Internet sites; and community parent-support programming ideas.

PARENTS AskERIC — An electronic mail question-and-answer service for parents and those who work with parents on issues related to child development, care, and education.

PARENTING-L — An informal Internet discussion list for parents and parenting professionals that focuses on current parenting concerns.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND PARENTING PROFESSIONALS — A large and growing collection of articles, essays, and other materials on family life, child development, and parenting from birth through early adolescence.

NPIN ILLINOIS — An information service and World Wide Web site that connects parents and families to services and resources around the state. Visit the information link for Illinois families at: http://npinil.crc.uiuc.edu

How Can You Participate?

- Visit NPIN's Web site at: http://npin.org
- Use PARENTS AskERIC by emailing parenting questions to: askeric@askeric.org
- Work with NPIN to share your high-quality parenting materials. The list of organizations contributing information to NPIN continues to expand. It includes the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships; the National Association for the Education of Young Children; the National Urban League; National Fathers' Network; and many other organizations.
- Provide feedback, and suggest new materials to be acquired and topics or issues that you or the families you work with would like to see included on the National Parent Information Network.
- Contact NPIN to discuss a training workshop for your local family center, library, Head Start program, school, or parenting organization.

For more information, contact:

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Toll-Free Number: 800-583-4135

Families, Technology, & Education Initiative: http://npin.org/fte.html

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education and the National Parent Information Network

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system designed to provide users with ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. Established in 1966, ERIC is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and is administered by the National Library of Education.

The ERIC database, the world's largest source of education information, contains nearly a million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. You can access the ERIC database online via the Internet, on CD-ROM, or through the printed abstract journals *Resources in Education* and *Current Index to Journals in Education*. The database is updated monthly (quarterly on CD-ROM), ensuring that the information you receive is timely and accurate.

The ERIC system, through its 16 subject-specific clearinghouses, associated adjunct clearinghouses, and support components, provides a variety of services and products that can help you stay up to date on a broad range of education-related issues. Products include research summaries, bibliographies, reference and referral services, computer searches, and document reproduction.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE), one of the 16 ERIC clearinghouses, specializes in the education, care, and parenting of children from birth through early adolescence, and operates the National Parent Information Network (NPIN). All the ERIC clearinghouses acquire significant literature within their particular scope; select the highest quality and most relevant materials; and catalog, index, and abstract them for input into the ERIC database. The clearinghouses also provide research summaries, bibliographies, information analysis papers, and many other products and services. Together, the clearinghouses present the most compre-hensive mosaic of education information in the country.

For more information on the ERIC system and ERIC/EECE, please visit our World Wide Web site at http://ericeece.org or call us at 800-583-4135.

Feature Articles

Work and Family:
How Can Parents Balance the Demands of Both?

Dawn Ramsburg and Anne S. Robertson

volume 2, number 11

How would you answer this question: What is the most important aspect of your life? When men and women are asked this question as part of the General Social Survey conducted annually in the United States, the most popular answer is "my family." The second most popular answer is "my work." Unfortunately, these two most important parts of Americans' lives often pull parents in opposite directions.

Parents are frequently caught in the middle between work and family demands: Your child is sick so you must stay home from work and miss a meeting because you can't find child care and your child needs you the most at this time. Or, your elderly father is in the hospital 100 miles away, so you need time off to be with him. What if your boss says that if you miss any more days from work, you'll lose your current position? Or, what if you don't receive a promotion because your boss thinks you're not committed to your job? Each day, many families face these kinds of "choices" between job security and family responsibility.

Work/family dilemmas usually begin during the late stage of the first pregnancy. Although many companies have a maternity leave policy that allows an employee to return to her same position after a 60- to 90-day leave, few employers, if any, compensate women on maternity leave for time lost. Additionally, the family is faced with finding child care for a newborn—not an easy feat. Good child care, for children of any age, may be difficult to find, but for children from birth to 2 years of age, there are fewer child care providers. Also, a high-quality program for infants and toddlers will maintain a high teacher–child ratio so that children can receive individual attention. The increased expense may be prohibitive for some parents.

Even when parents are able to find good, affordable child care, they may be concerned about the implications of controversial research on the effects of institutional care for children under 2 years old. For example, it has been found that for some children who begin full-time child care during their first year, different patterns of attachment to their mothers may develop compared to those of children not in full-time care. This finding is open to a wide range of interpretations that need to be investigated further to understand the potential impact on children's long-term development. Nevertheless, for this reason and others, few parents return to work guilt-free, and it is not unusual for a young parent to relinquish a career and financial security to stay home with the baby.

The economic implications of these decisions are compelling. A young family, or a single parent, is faced with the stress of reduced financial resources during a formative stage of family development. When a young parent opts to leave his or her job and stay home to care for the child, the employer is faced with the expense of hiring and retraining a new employee. For some families, having one partner stay home full-time is the best solution, but other families need other options. Increasingly, businesses are recognizing the social and economic benefits of developing alternatives for their employees.

For example, companies like Marriott International, Inc., have found that support for pregnant mothers pays not only in social benefits but also in reduced insurance costs resulting from reduced

numbers of high-risk pregnancies. An on-site nurse advises pregnant mothers on health, nutrition, and exercise; and the company's on-site lactation room is available for nursing mothers who have returned to work. Other companies, such as First Chicago NBD and PanEnergy, have similar programs.

In an attempt to reduce parents' struggles among difficult choices, we have compiled information from various sources to help you meet your responsibilities to your job and your family. It is important to keep in mind while reading these articles that this information is aimed at all parents (mothers and fathers).

The first section provides a general overview of "Family Friendly" policies in the workplace. The next sections provide suggestions on how to win these policies in your work environment, names of companies that are leaders in this area, tips for balancing family life, and additional resources that we hope will be helpful to you and those you work with.

I. Workplace Policies That Support Families

The most common way for businesses to support families is through leave policies, support for dependent care, and flexible work schedules.

Leave Policies

Leave policies are important because they allow time away from work to respond to family needs without a loss in job security. At the same time, companies retain valuable expertise, create more employee loyalty, and save money in training. The most common policies are:

- *Parental Leave.* Provides time off (often unpaid) for the birth of a child and parenting responsibilities; can cover biological and/or adoptive families.
- *Family Leave.* Covers parental leave as well as time off to care for other family members (spouse, child, parent, etc.) with a serious illness. (The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which requires businesses with 50 or more employees to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to employees, provided the first nationwide family leave policy.)
- *Medical or Disability Leave.* Provides time off for an employee who is temporarily disabled and unable to work. (Note: The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 considers pregnancy a disability; therefore, organizations with 15 or more employees must provide the same leave and benefits to pregnant workers as they would to any other temporarily disabled employee.)

Dependent Care (Child and Elder Care)

Dependent care policies are important because they help to provide support for the employee's extended family. This support may be provided through financial assistance policies, direct services, or information services.

1. Direct Services:

   On-site/Near-site Child Care. Sponsors or subsidizes the cost of child care centers so all employees can afford child care.

   Consortium Child Care Centers. Offers groups of employers the opportunity to share the costs and benefits of creating a child care center. This option is particularly useful for small businesses.

   Emergency/Sick Care. Provides care for children who are ill or who need temporary care.

   School-age Services. Supports after-school programs and warm-lines (call-in services for older children at home alone), sponsors seminars for children to learn the skills needed to stay home alone, or provides programs for vacations and holidays.

2. Financial Assistance:

   Vouchers. Pays part of an employee's child care costs in the form of a flat fee, a percentage of the cost, etc.

   Discounts. Negotiates with child care centers for a discount for employees.

   Dependent Care Assistance Plans. Allows employees to use pre-tax dollars to cover dependent care expenses.

   Long-term Care Insurance. Provides insurance to help employees pay for long-term care for themselves or dependents, spouses, or parents.

Respite Care. Provides full or partial reimbursement of the costs associated with hiring a caregiver so employees who care for elderly relatives can take a brief break from their responsibilities.

3. Information, Training, and Referral:

   Child and Elder Care Referral. Provides information on types of care and services available in the community, often as part of national networks. Can provide counseling or written materials to help employees choose among options.

   Work-Family Seminars. Conducts on-site seminars on issues related to parenting, balancing work and family, and caring for elderly relatives.

Flexible Schedules

Flexible schedules have become a popular trend in many companies. They help employees balance work and family responsibilities, while allowing employers to meet their business needs. There are many types of flexible schedules, including:

- *Flextime.* Employees set different start and end times to their work day, while working the same number of hours per day or week.
- *Part-time Work.* Employees work fewer hours, with prorated pay and benefits, while maintaining the job security of a full-time employee.
- *Flexplace (or "telecommuting").* Employees work off-site, at home or a satellite office, during all or part of their scheduled hours.
- *Job Sharing.* Two or more employees share the responsibilities of a full-time job, with prorated salaries and benefits.
- *Compressed Work Weeks.* Employees condense a standard work week into fewer than 5 days.
- *Voluntary Reduced Work Time.* Full-time employees reduce their work hours for a period of time with a corresponding reduction in pay (differs from part-time because of the expectation that the employee will return to full-time work after a limited period of time).

II. How To Win "Family-Friendly" Policies at Work

Is it possible to persuade your company to implement any of these policies? We have compiled some guidelines for ways you can build support for such policies with your employer. Please keep in mind that you may need to adapt this list for your situation.

1. Generate Support:

   Work collaboratively with other employees so that everyone has an opportunity to express what his or her family needs.

   Decide What You Want. What type of policy are you looking for from your employer? Do you want to gather support for flexible work schedules? Make a list of all things you would like. Be sure to consider immediate needs as well as long-term needs.

   Approach Others Who Have Similar Needs and Create a Group. Talk to people you work with about what you would like to have. Find other people who share your interests and needs and meet with them. Try to approach people at all levels of the company and don't worry if the group is small at first.

   Gather Information. Determine what is happening now in your company—what are its resources? What policies exist at similar companies? Consider doing a survey of employee needs.

   Determine Whom to Talk to. Find out who is responsible for implementing employee policy. Also, find out who can advocate most effectively for your group.

2. Propose Change(s):

   Develop a team or committee that can follow through on recommendations with the employer.

   List Priorities and the "Bottom Line." Look at your list and identify the most important goals. When prioritizing, try to focus on policies that apply to as many workers as possible. Decide what is the "least" you could all be happy with.

Prepare Your Argument. You will want to demonstrate need, the impact of the present situation on the company, and how your policy can benefit the company. Also, show that the employees are committed to winning the change they need. Rehearse your case and prepare responses for all possible questions or reactions.

Ask for the Changes. Arrange a meeting with the people you need to talk to, and present your case.

3. Follow-up:

The committee, as well as other interested employees, might collaborate in follow-up activities focused on communicating effectively that you will continue to work for family-friendly policies.

Follow-up in Writing. Write a letter of thanks after the meeting and use this letter as an opportunity to repeat your key points. Ask for a response by a certain date.

Inform the Group. Make sure that everyone knows what is going on so that you maintain support among employees.

Follow Through. Do any tasks necessary as quickly as possible. Ask for any resources you need to complete them.

Celebrate Any Victory. Any progress is a victory; celebrate it with your group.

III. The 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers

Now that we've examined the characteristics of a family-friendly workplace, it is useful to look at companies that have taken the lead in implementing such policies. *Working Mother* magazine has just released its 11th annual survey on the 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers.

Some interesting findings are:

- an increase in the use of flexible work schedules as well as an increase in the number of companies providing training to managers and employees on how to develop such schedules;
- a growing awareness that child care needs aren't limited to company headquarters as more on-site centers at field locations are opened;
- more new fathers and adoptive parents using paid leave;
- more programs that set specific goals for promotion of women to senior management levels, and the growing number of companies that now evaluate managers on achieving that goal;
- continued support for the American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care, which aims to improve and expand dependent care (elder and child) in their communities.

It is important to keep in mind that making a company family-friendly is useful not only to the employees, but to employers as well. Companies can experience lower turnover and a more productive workforce by providing these policies.

Other interesting highlights from this year's *Working Mother* survey are:

- Nine of 15 companies on the list with fewer than 1,000 employees offer child care services without impacting negatively on the companies' bottom line.
- A frequent objection from employers in terms of child care assistance is that they can't help employees when they are not concentrated at one site. Yet, TIAA-CREF arranged with a national child care chain that specializes in emergency care to provide employees in 4 cities with 10 free days of backup care; Fannie Mae headquarters provides employees on-site emergency care, while workers at other locations are issued vouchers to pay for backup care; and SAS Institute charges workers at headquarters $200 per month for on-site care, while employees at its 29 field offices pay $200 monthly for care, with the SAS Institute paying the difference.
- Most companies in the United States fail to provide employees with adequate time off surrounding the birth of a baby or during illness of family members. However, 23 companies in the *Working Mother* survey provided

paid leave to new fathers. In addition, 27 of the companies offered fully paid leaves to adopting parents.

- Twelve companies from the survey offer formal policies that allow employees to reduce their schedules for a period of time so they have more time to spend with their families.

Working Mother magazine also identified the 10 best companies for working mothers, based on criteria that included pay, opportunities to advance, child care, flexibility (in work schedules), and other family-friendly benefits. The top 10 companies were:

1. Barnett Banks
2. Eli Lilly
3. Hewlett-Packard
4. IBM
5. Johnson & Johnson
6. MBNA America Bank
7. Merck
8. NationsBank
9. Patagonia
10. Xerox

(The survey summary first appeared in *Working Mother* in October 1996, written by Milton Moskowitz. Reprinted with the permission of *Working Mother* magazine. Copyright 1996 by *Working Mother* magazine. For more information, visit the *Working Mother* Web site: http://www.workingmother.com.)

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Fathers DO Make a Difference

James May, Project Director, National Fathers' Network

volume 3, number 3

This past spring, I gave a keynote address at an early childhood conference with over 1,200 special education teachers, providers, and family members in attendance. The title of my presentation was, "Fathers: The Forgotten Parent." It was a special occasion for me, as my 84-year-old dad was in the audience and hearing me speak for the first time. There was an emotional strength and poignancy to my remarks. Upon completing the speech, I was approached by a young woman. After complimenting me for the talk, she remarked, "I almost didn't come today. When I looked at the program last night, I was angry that someone was speaking about fathers. I just couldn't see what that had to do with families of children with disabilities. Was I ever wrong."

This comment captures much of the past decade and my work with fathers of children with special needs and the providers who are a part of their lives. Despite our embracing the principles of family-centered care and our awareness about the drastic changes in family demographics and how economics have made 70% of all homes in America dual-income households, the role of fathers still remains ambiguous.

I started this job in the fall of 1986 with the sole task of starting father support groups for men whose children had disabilities. I always remember my first session; three people were in attendance, and the lone father hardly said a word all evening. Ultimately, I answered my own questions and drove home wondering just what I had gotten myself into.

Early on, when telling teachers and health care personnel about my goal of enhanced father involvement, the typical response was: "Gosh, that's great, but you don't think men will really show up, do you?" That attitude persisted for years and still does in many subtle ways, but come they did. There are now over 80 fathers' programs in 36 states and Canada. There are 14 programs in California alone, and two states, California and Washington, have statewide networks. There are three fathers' programs in New Zealand. Inquiries have been received from literally every region of the world. With few exceptions (our Bellevue program has more than 100 participants), the programs are not large. What counts is that increasing numbers of men are fully involved and active members in their children's lives and the health care decisions that affect them.

In 1986, our organization was the only federally funded program advocating for fathers of children with special health care needs. In 1997, that is still the case. One can do a MEDLINE search and find fewer than 30 articles about fathers of children with disabilities. Thus, while interest and concern for fathers have increased, the actual programs and research regarding men continue to be inadequate. Few males enter the field of early childhood education, and those that do often realize how isolated they are. Where I work, the Kindering Center Neurodevelopmental Center for children birth to 3, there are 30 staff—28 women and 2 men. Neither of us is directly involved with the children (physical and occupational therapy, speech and classroom). The reasons for this lack of male involvement are many: low salaries, poor recruitment by colleges and universities, a failure by men to see this work as important and of great consequence, and social service agencies unwilling to search out, train, and employ men.

Children lose out when this happens. One fact has not changed over the years—children need men in their lives. The research is eminently clear about the results of such involvement: children develop

enhanced empathy and sensitivity to others; personal independence is increased, as is a child's sexual identity and perspective for the future. The building of healthy, appropriate relationships is elevated.

The stigma that men do not want to be involved in their children's lives persists. Being the family breadwinner is still seen as the primary function for men. Corporate America, despite limited family medical leave provisions, generally embraces this stereotype. Yet one of the fastest growing populations in the United States is the single-father, full-custodial home. About 1.3 million fathers are in such a position, a 100% increase in the past decade. What they need are resources and support, flexible hours, and a service provider system that makes them know they are welcome and needed in the care of their children. All men need such supports!

What has sustained me through the years are the men themselves. They have shared their pain, their losses, their joys and hopes. In particular, I have been profoundly touched by men whose children have HIV. Often seen as pariahs, many of these men live in a world of profound isolation and guilt, raising their sick children in an environment of non-existent support or understanding. Yet when they meet other men, they learn they are not alone. They discover that reaching out for help is an act of strength. They all agree that involvement with their children has given them new definitions of fatherhood; they are more patient, they let go and live more fully in the moment, and they openly play with, hug, and love their kids. Letting tears flow after so many years of "being strong" is a relief—never an embarrassment—and good humor and fraternity bond the men together.

In an article about his 3-year-old son Alex, born with the complications from a prenatal stroke, John Tierney of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, captures the essence of what many men are learning from their children about fatherhood:

> Alex has helped me discover the unyielding positive person within myself. He has taught me about courage, discipline, and hope. He has helped me to define myself and my goals. He has made me realize that being a loving husband and father is what truly defines a man's worth.

Are health care and educational settings increasingly "father friendly?" Perhaps. Are the stereotypes of men as incompetent, boozing womanizers changing? Slightly. Are men changing and learning? Absolutely! The challenge for all of us was articulated in 1989 by Randi Wolf and certainly remains the same today:

> Children need and deserve the love and attention of both parents. Let's work together so that every parent is fully respected and every child has the opportunity to establish close bonds with both men and women right from the start. There is nothing more critical to the long-range future of our species than raising our children well. As there is nothing more difficult, it makes sense to muster all the forces available. In this spirit, let's . . . welcome fathers as full and equal partners in this task.

Source

Wolf, R. (1989). Partnerships beyond pretense: A challenge to moms and dads. *Family Resource Coalition, 8*(3), 3.

Brain Development in Young Children: The Early Years ARE Learning Years

Dawn Ramsburg

volume 3, number 4

Introduction

Much attention has been focused recently on the importance of the early years for young children's healthy mental development. Activities have included a plenary session devoted to the need for investment in children from birth through the first three years of life at the National Governors' Association (February 1997) meeting and a guest appearance by Hillary Rodham Clinton at the April 1997 meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development. At this meeting, Mrs. Clinton called attention to the importance of early experience in child development and described a conference the White House will host in late April (1997) on early development and learning.

A primary reason for all this increased attention was the 1994 release of *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children* by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. This report documented the burgeoning literature on young children's emotional, social, physical, intellectual, and brain development and concluded that "how children function from the preschool years all the way through adolescence, and even adulthood, hinges in large part on their experience before the age of three" (p. 6).

Why the increased attention on the early years? Since the 1970s, strong evidence has emerged that suggests that activity, experience, and stimulation can alter brain development. In recent years, technological advances have enabled researchers to make important advances and discoveries in brain research. As a result of the emerging evidence, a shift is taking place in traditional views of development in young children.

Emerging Views on Brain Development in Young Children

In the past, the two dominant views on children's development proposed that children either came into the world genetically pre-programmed ("nature") or that they were a "blank slate" on which their environment shaped their development ("nurture"). The debate over nature vs. nurture is fading quickly, however, as scientists now are investigating the complex ways in which genes and environment interact. Scientists understand that both nature and nurture shape brain development, and that each set of influences is dominant to varying degrees at various points in time.

Brain Development in the Prenatal Period

Before birth, nature is the dominant actor in brain development, although the environment also plays an important role. According to Dr. Pasko Rakic, a professor of neuroscience at Yale University, "The number of neurons and the way that they are organized is determined by heredity" (Jabs, 1996, p. 24). Scientists know that during the third week of pregnancy, a thin layer of cells in the developing embryo folds inward to create a fluid-filled cylinder called the "neural tube" (Berk, 1994, p. 99). It is in the neural tube where the production of neurons, the brain cells that store and transmit information, begins—at the rate of 250,000 per minute (Nash, 1997, p. 52).

By the end of the second trimester, the process of producing neurons is completed. No more neurons will ever be produced again in an individual's lifetime. Some neurons are programmed for specific functions such as breathing, controlling the

heartbeat, regulating body temperatures, or producing reflexes. But, for the most part, neurons are not designated to perform specific tasks, and thus brain development is not complete at this point.

Although nature or genetics plays the dominant role in the prenatal period, the environment is important at this time as well. Researchers have found that environmental factors such as maternal malnutrition, substance abuse (including alcohol, smoking, illegal drugs, and use of over-the-counter medications), exposure to chemicals or radiation, and viral infections (such as measles) can lead to adverse effects on the developing brain.

Brain Development Following Birth

While newborns are born with all the neurons they will ever have, a new phase of brain development begins after birth—the wiring phase. Following birth, each of the brain's 100 billion neurons creates links to thousands of others (Nash, 1997, p. 53). This process is accomplished as neurons produce a web of wire-like fibers called axons (which transmit signals) and dendrites (which receive signals). Once axons make their first connections, the nerves begin to fire (Nash, 1997, p. 53). It is at this point that the environment begins to take over in the process of brain development. Scientists often describe this stage as the equivalent of creating telephone trunk lines between the right neighborhoods in the right cities. At this point in development, the brain has to sort out which wires belong to which house (Nash, 1997, p. 53). It is with these maps that learning will take place (Carnegie, 1994).

The most important factor in this process of developing connections is stimulation, or repeated experience. Scientists now know that in the months after birth, the number of synapses increases from 50 trillion to 1,000 trillion (Carnegie, 1994). Neurons that are stimulated by input from the surrounding environment continue to establish new synapses. Those that are seldom stimulated soon die off. According to Dr. Harry Chugani, a professor of pediatric neurology at Wayne State University, "It's like a highway system. Roads with the most traffic get widened. The ones that are rarely used fall into disrepair" (Nash, 1997, p. 26).

Critical Periods in Brain Development

Because of the evidence emerging on synaptic development, scientists believe that appropriate stimulation of the child's brain is critically important during periods in which the formation of synapses is at its peak (Berk, 1994). It is during these critical periods, or windows of opportunity that exist for different brain functions, when a child's experiences can make the most difference. And, for some areas, if the connections between neurons are not developed during these critical periods, they will never develop at all.

One area of brain development that has received much attention in determining its critical period is vision. It has been found that the synapses associated with vision multiply quickly in 2- to 4-month-olds and keep increasing until around 8 months (Jabs, 1996, p. 25). At 8 months, each neuron is connected to 15,000 other neurons (Begley, 1996, p. 56). This rate makes sense when we realize that infants have limited motor skills and spend much waking time watching the world around them. Yet researchers have found that a baby whose eyes are clouded by cataracts from birth will, despite cataract removal surgery at the age of 2, be forever blind. This finding indicates that the window of opportunity for vision does not stay open for a long period of time.

Implications of These Findings

Does this research mean that it is too late to make a difference in the brain's development after age 3? Absolutely not. Researchers have found that the brain during the first years of life is malleable, citing instances in which very young children who suffer strokes or injuries that wipe out an entire brain hemisphere still mature into highly functioning adults (Nash, 1997, p. 54). Children have also been found to overcome emotional and physical abuse suffered during the first year, presumably because of "plasticity," or the ability to rewire damaged brain areas.

It is also important for parents not to push children during this period and provide too much stimulation. Parents who try to rush children through the stages of development are asking children to function with capacities that may not be ready to be used (Jabs, 1996, p. 25). In addition, if

parents try to push children, they may form connections between certain activities and stress. Parents who try to force a child to complete a puzzle before he or she is developmentally ready may decrease the child's disposition to do the puzzle or engage in related activities because of the stress connection. (For more information on dispositions in young children and how to encourage the disposition to be intellectually curious, see Lilian Katz's ERIC/EECE Digest *Dispositions as Educational Goals.*)

With few exceptions—vision perhaps one of the more notable—the windows of opportunity in brain development do not close abruptly. What research findings do indicate is the importance of helping children develop a sound foundation in early learning so that they have the building blocks for a lifetime of learning. This foundation comes from stimulating education and child care experiences during the early years.

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Building Partnerships between Parent and Physician: A Pediatrician's Point of View

Howard S. King, MD, MPH

volume 3, number 7

We receive a large volume of questions, through our Parents AskERIC service, from parents who have a health-related concern for their child. Some of these concerns might have been addressed if there had been more effective communication between the parent and physician. Dr. King has provided some ideas that may provide insight into the problem of effective communication.

Not long ago, a friend asked me what was the most common question parents ask about the emotional development of children. Initially, I was uncertain about the answer. Was it, "Is my child's behavior normal?" or "What can I do to make sure I am doing the right thing?" But, on reflection, I decided it was often something else. When parents are concerned about their child, they frequently ask, "Could you recommend something I can read?"

The good news is that by asking such a question, parents demonstrate that they are being reflective about a particular problem and that they want to do something about it. It may also show that they trust the pediatrician by asking for help, if only to recommend something to read.

But the bad news with recommending something to read is that many problems are better handled by talking them out, face-to-face. When parents ask, "Could you recommend something for me to read?" perhaps they are really saying that they don't expect the doctor to take the time to discuss their issues, face-to-face.

The family pediatrician has a unique advantage with helping parents address the emotional problems of children. He has known the family over time, has been available to address serious health issues, has observed the child's growth and development, and is often present at periods of transition and stress. Nevertheless, it is true that pediatricians and parents have often not capitalized on this advantage. Too often, parents are either prematurely reassured or referred too quickly. If parents and pediatricians could discuss the possibility of thoughtful, empathic listening, not looking at the clock, both might discover that many problems could at least be better understood, and possibly even solved, just by taking the time to talk. It does require, however, that the pediatrician really listen, striving to understand how the whole family is coping.

The following suggestions are offered with the hope that they might help parents create such a relationship with their physician. If they could, it might be a step toward solving their child's problem. For example, parents might:

- *Ask if the physician is willing to help with an emotional problem.* At their earliest meeting, parents should consider asking if the doctor is willing to help with behavior concerns. If she is not, then parents should ask for a recommendation for another professional who can assist them with their child's problem.
- *Question the physician if he tells you that your child "will grow out of it."* Parents need to feel certain that they have been given adequate opportunity to describe the problem or to have their child assessed.
- *Review the issue of confidentiality with the physician.* Parents may wish to ask the

physician how their child's medical record and the private information that the parent may be sharing will be protected. Physicians need to listen and reassure parents that details are protected from being shared with anyone who might misuse the information.

Understanding what is involved in an adequate assessment of your child's problem is also important. An adequate assessment may take an hour or longer and may include a history of the family as well as the child. It is helpful for parents to describe if their child's problem coincided with some event or if it is chronic, when it occurs, the duration, if there is a family history of this type of concern, and what the parents have done to help the child. Perhaps the parents view the problem differently. What are their worst fears if it continues? While these types of questions may make a parent feel uncomfortable, they are important for a full assessment of the child's situation. Finally, a good assessment should include a discussion of the child's and the family's strengths.

If the physician views the parent as a teacher, the doctor–patient relationship could evolve into a very special partnership. Furthermore, if doctor and parent could accomplish such a meeting of minds and feelings, then it is reasonable to hope that the parent, in turn, might move on to helping his or her child become similarly competent. However, how can parents judge the quality of their child's evaluation? Parents should feel that:

- the physician is profoundly interested in them as people,
- they have shared their thoughts and feelings,
- they have gained a renewed sense of competence in addressing the problems of their child, and
- they have choices in confronting these problems and that they have the capacity for making good decisions.

While it is painful for parents to confront developmental issues in their children, such problems could also be viewed as an opportunity to assess how they and their child are doing. The earlier this assessment is accomplished, the better. If parents can find an empathic listener, they may discover the problem has been bubbling under the surface for some time. By working with the pediatrician to consider how their family is doing, parents may find constructive interventions that could help their family become stronger.

For more information on patient–physician partnerships or health-related concerns, please consult the following:

American Academy of Pediatrics
Department of Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health
141 Northwest Point Blvd.
P.O. Box 927
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0927
Telephone: 800-433-9016

Touchpoints Project
1295 Boylston St.
Boston, MA 02115
Telephone: 617-355-8158

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Making the Internet Family-Friendly: How Parents Can Help

Dawn Ramsburg

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On June 26, 1997, the Supreme Court ruled that the Communications Decency Act (CDA), the law that would have limited communication on the Internet to what is suitable for minors, was unconstitutional. According to the opinion written by Justice John Paul Stevens, "Speech on the Internet is entitled to the highest level of First Amendment protection, similar to the protection the Court gives to books and newspapers" (Greenhouse, 1997). While the Court regarded the law's goal as legitimate and important, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor described the law as clearly unconstitutional because it was "akin to a law that makes it a crime for a bookstore owner to sell pornographic magazines to anyone once a minor enters the store" (Greenhouse, 1997).

In the wake of the Supreme Court decision, Mary Somerville at the American Library Association stated that, "The Supreme Court ruling means that Americans will enjoy the same access to information in cyberspace that we have on library and bookstore shelves. It means parents can decide for their own children what they do—and don't—want them to read" (American Library Association, 1997). However, it is precisely because the responsibility for children's online activities falls on those who watch over them—parents, teachers, librarians—that considerable discussion has occurred in recent weeks over how to create a safe, educational environment on the Internet without infringing upon the First Amendment right of free speech.

To help facilitate those discussions, the White House convened a meeting on July 16, 1997, with leaders representing companies in the Internet industry and organizations representing education, children, parents, consumers, and law enforcement. President Clinton and Vice President Gore announced a strategy at this meeting for making the Internet family-friendly as well as First Amendment-friendly, so that it will be safe and rewarding for users and still enjoy First Amendment rights. The White House strategy is designed to give parents and teachers the tools they need to prevent children from getting access to inappropriate material on the Internet, and to guide them towards high-quality educational resources.

The three-prong strategy is to:

- make blocking and filtering software for parents widely available;
- increase enforcement efforts of existing laws that prohibit transmission of child pornography and obscenity over the Internet—that were not affected by the Court's decision on the CDA and that are not protected by the First Amendment; and
- encourage greater parental involvement by increasing education efforts on how to use the Internet effectively.

Examples of some of the commitments made by the computer industry at this meeting include:

- Over 90% of World Wide Web "browsers" will include Internet filtering technology, as Netscape announced it will join Microsoft in incorporating this software in their next major releases. This technology, called Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS), allows parents to choose from a variety of rating systems to block sites that are considered inappropriate for children.

- Major computer manufacturers (Acer, Apple Computer, Compaq, IBM, and Packard Bell) will bundle home PCs with filtering software, and most Internet service providers will offer filtering software for free, or for a small fee. This software allows parents to block objectionable sites, and some can limit the amount of time that a child spends online or prevent a child from typing personal information in an online chat room.
- Internet directory companies (such as Yahoo, Excite, and Lycos) are promoting the use of "ratings" of Internet sites for use by filtering technology.

More specific recommendations and further commitments by the industry, organizations, and companies are anticipated to come from the "Families Online Summit" to be held in October 1997.

What Does the Internet Offer Families?

With all of this concern over Internet safety, some parents may wonder why they should bother with the Internet. What does the Internet offer families? Although it is true that there is much to be wary of in cyberspace, Wendy Lazurus, co-director of the Children's Partnership, points out that "The Internet is an excellent resource for families, and it is becoming an even richer one for information and educational activities" (Harmon, 1997).

Some of the ways that your family might use the Internet include:

- finding reference information on news, weather, sports, product reviews, and people;
- conducting transactions such as travel reservations, banking, and shopping;
- communicating with people around the world;
- finding educational information on virtually any topic, such as homework help;
- providing entertainment; and
- enhancing computing by accessing online free pubic domain software titles.

Children can benefit emotionally and socially from the Internet as well. For example, being online allows children to escape from their physical selves and to experiment with their identity in a less self-conscious way than in person (Rubenstein, 1996). That is, no one will necessarily know if you are a boy or a girl, if you have a disability, if you are shy, or if you have the right clothes or the right haircut. Children can also express their fears and concerns with less embarrassment and greater openness than many are able to do in real life.

General Safety Tips

Despite the many benefits of the Internet, there are some risks for children who use online services. However, just as you teach your child rules about dealing with strangers outside the home, help them pick out books at the library, and talk with them about what stores they are allowed to visit, rules for communicating online must also be established.

The American Library Association (1997) suggests that children:

- always ask an adult for permission before using their name, address, telephone number, or school name while online;
- always tell a parent or other adult if they see something scary or confusing on the Internet;
- never respond to messages that make them feel uncomfortable;
- never give out a credit card number or password online; and
- never arrange to meet someone they have met online, unless they discuss it with their parents and an adult goes with them.

It is a good idea to establish general rules and guidelines for computer use for home or school around such issues as the amount of time that can be spent daily online. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (1994) suggests posting these rules near the computer as a reminder. They also remind parents to make computer use a family activity, and to consider putting the computer in a family room rather than the child's bedroom. They point out that these strategies will allow parents more opportunities to get to know their children's online friends just as they would get to know their other friends.

For additional protection, parents may also want to use blocking and filtering software, like those

mentioned as part of the White House strategy, to reduce some of the risks of finding inappropriate material online. The filters block obscene or pornographic material by maintaining a list of objectionable Web sites or by scanning the Web for objectionable terms and blocking Web pages which contain those terms (Children, Youth and Family Consortium [CYFC], 1997). This technology is not foolproof, however. For filters that maintain a list of sites, there are so many new sites added to the Web each day that the lists need to be updated continually. In addition, it is very time-consuming for parents to review and edit lists to ensure that they are blocking only what should be blocked and are not too restrictive.

For products that block material by scanning for offensive words, most are not capable of blocking only offensive material. Instead, they may unintentionally block sites that could contain useful, educational materials that families need or would like to know about (CYFC, 1997). In addition, many Web site producers are also skilled in using words with double meanings that may appear harmless to the scanners.

Evaluating Material Found Online

Once safety rules have been established for online activities, the next step is to learn how to evaluate the quality of the information found on the Internet. According to the University of Minnesota's Children, Youth and Family Consortium (1997), there are three essential components to consider:

- content (the information contained in the Web site);
- authorship (the creator, organization, or publisher of a Web site); and
- readability (the ease with which information can be read, viewed, navigated, and understood by the user).

Some important questions to ask when evaluating a Web site include:

- What is the purpose of the information?
- Is it age appropriate?
- Is there an author or sponsor listed?
- Is the author/sponsor credible?
- What is the nature of the sponsor (commercial, nonprofit, educational)?
- How often is the information updated?
- How easy is it to navigate the site?
- Is the material copyrighted? Is proper credit given for material protected by the copyright law?

The CYFC asserts that the better Web sites contain accurate information from a reliable source that is clearly articulated and easy to use.

Conclusion

Sooner or later, nearly all children will be exposed to the Internet—if not at home, then at school or at the library. No software package or government regulation can be a suitable substitute for adult guidance. Knowing this, parents must be available to supervise their children when they are using computers, just as they would supervise other activities. In addition to helping make children's time on the Internet safer, spending time with your child online can help your child learn responsibility, good conduct, and the values that are important to your family. The key to making the Internet family-friendly is continued sharing of responsibility among government agencies, the Internet industry, and parents.

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Additional Resources

Internet

The Families, Technology, and Education Conference in late October 1997 will address issues related to child safety on the Internet.
Internet: http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/fte/ftehome.html

"Child Safety on the Information Superhighway," developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (Education & Resources section).
Internet: http://www.missingkids.org

"FreeZone Safety Tips for Parents and Teachers," developed by FreeZone.
Internet: http://freezone.com/safety/parents.html

"A Guide to Internet Parenting," developed by the Voters Telecommunications Watch.
Internet:
http://www.vtw.org/parents/pamphlet.html

"The Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace for Parents and Kids," developed by the American Library Association.
Internet: http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/safe.html

"The Parent's Guide to the Information Superhighway: Rules and Tools for Families Online," developed by The Children's Partnership, working with the National PTA and the National Urban League.
Internet: http://www.childrenspartnership.org/bbar.pbpg.html

"Surfin the Net for Kids and Families," sponsored by Metronet and the University of Minnesota Children, Youth and Family Consortium.
Internet: http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/surfin.html

Books

The Connected Family: Bridging the Digital Generation Gap, by Seymour Papert (Longstreet Press; $22.95)

The Dummies Guide to Family Computing: The World Wide Web for Kids and Parents, by Viraf D. Mohta (IDG; $22.99)

The Dummies Guide to Family Computing: Take Charge of Computing for Teens and Parents, by Pam Dixon (IDG; $22.99)

Internet Kids & Family Yellow Page, (2nd ed.), by Jean Armour Polly (Osborne/McGraw-Hill; $19.99)

Early Education for Children with Special Needs

Dr. Michaelene M. Ostrosky

volume 3, number 9

Parents frequently wonder if their child is developing normally. While there are many resources available that show typical developmental "benchmarks" for young children, parents may struggle to find support if it appears that their child does not meet those benchmarks. Many communities now have early intervention specialists affiliated with the local school district or health facility who are able to assess a young child and recommend support services, if needed, for the parent and child. Frequently, this support is provided through home visiting.

The field of Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE), which includes services for young children with special needs from birth through age 5, is relatively new. As early as 1975, some states were providing services to preschoolers with disabilities; however, in many states, preschool services were not made available until Public Law 99-457 was passed in 1986. This law required that states provide a free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities age 3 through age 5.

Public Law 99-457 also included incentives (e.g., grant money) for states to serve infants and toddlers with special needs. This federal law provides a general definition of which children, birth to age 5, are eligible for EI/ECSE services. Each state is then responsible for creating more specific guidelines to determine eligibility as well as designation of diagnostic instruments or procedures to be used in identifying children and families who will be served. For example, states may include, at their discretion, "at-risk infants and toddlers" in their definition of "infant and toddler with a disability." Children are considered at-risk of having a delay if early intervention is not provided when certain risk factors, such as poverty, are present. In general, the increase in early intervention over the past 20 years has been a result of research documenting the importance of early supports for children with disabilities and for their families, the increased societal commitment to young children, and the federal legislation mandating early childhood preschool services.

Early intervention professionals work with children and families who have a wide range of strengths and needs. This diversity requires that professionals have a sound knowledge of child development, a broad understanding of various disabilities and risk conditions, and an array of strategies for gathering new information when it is needed. Additionally, given the interdisciplinary nature of early intervention services, professionals need skills in working on teams and in working with families as partners in the design and provision of EI/ECSE services. Finally, EI/ECSE services are provided in a variety of settings (e.g., preschools, homes, hospitals, child care centers), and professionals must be skilled in working within these settings.

It is important to remember that young children typically spend the majority of their time outside of the "formal" intervention time (e.g., they spend more time with family members or others than they do in a preschool classroom or in a parent-child play group); opportunities for learning occur whenever children interact with the people and materials in these varied environments. Thus, individuals across settings need to be knowledgeable of, and skilled in, implementing the interventions that have been designed for young children. For example, if a preschooler is learning

to use sign language at preschool, then his parents, siblings, extended family members, and other child care providers also should learn to respond to these signs and to communicate with this child using signs in conjunction with verbalizations.

Children usually first enter the early intervention system because parents have concerns about their child's development, or because a referral has been made by a physician, family friend, or professional (e.g., the child's preschool teacher). Typically, the young child is assessed to determine if EI/ECSE services are warranted.

Assessment refers to the process of gathering information. Several specific purposes exist for assessing children. These purposes include screening their developmental abilities (e.g., cognitive, communication, and motor skills) to identify children who need further evaluation, determining whether children are eligible for specialized services (e.g., speech therapy), making diagnoses, planning intervention programs, and monitoring children's progress. Nondiscriminatory procedures should be followed in the assessment of young children, including:

- Assessment procedures should be administered in the native language of the parents or other mode of communication (e.g., signs, augmentative communication system) unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.
- Assessment and evaluation procedures and materials should not be racially or culturally discriminatory.
- A single procedure should not be used as the sole criterion for determining a child's eligibility.
- Qualified personnel should conduct assessments. Comprehensive assessments should include a combination of approaches for gathering information, including parent interviews, naturalistic observations, direct testing, and checklists.

Once a child is determined to be eligible for EI/ECSE services, the family and team of professionals design an intervention plan for the child. There is no single curriculum or intervention model that meets the needs of all children with special needs and their families, so an individualized approach to providing early intervention services is necessary. Goals that are important to the family and that will support the child's growth, development, and independent functioning are targeted and become the child's individual curriculum. Ongoing monitoring ensures that, if progress is not being made, changes in intervention programming can be implemented to facilitate development.

The early years are critical to a young child's physical, cognitive, social, communicative, and emotional development. Through the provision of EI/ECSE services, we can help young children with special needs develop to their fullest potential. Parents who have concerns about their children's development should call their local school district office to obtain the phone number for the EI/ECSE program in their community.

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Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services, Early Childhood Research Institute
Internet resources: http://clas.uiuc.edu/links.html

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People Make Dreams Come True, and Technology Expands the Possibilities: An Educational Journey across the United States

Mark, Betsy, Donald, Kelly, and Stacy Blondin

volume 4, number 2

Members of the Blondin family were featured presenters at the Families, Technology, and Education Conference on October 31–November 1, 1997. Their presentation challenged the audience to think about new educational possibilities that are available to families when they are given access to new technologies and have the courage to make use of those resources. The following is an excerpt from their presentation.

People make dreams come true, and technology expands the possibilities. Our family dreamed of making an educational journey around the United States. A husband and wife of 17 years, a 14-year-old son, and 12-year-old twin daughters turned that dream into reality for almost nine incredible months. The adventure revolved around a unique learning experience that incorporated current technology.

Prior to finalizing plans for the trip, Donald, Kelly, and Stacy were enrolled at Northwest Academy, a new charter school in northern Michigan. It is a science- and technology-based public academy for grades 6 through 12. We approached the school with our plan to use electronic mail (email) and create a family Web site on the Internet as we traveled. School board members were not only willing, they were enthused to try this mutually beneficial experiment.

Armed with a laptop computer and a digital camera on loan from Northwest Academy, and with our desktop computer installed in the motor home, we began our technology-based travel school. The Web site was designed so students anywhere could tune in, share, and learn through our experiences and interact with us. Our technology-driven, hands-on learning began in Cleveland with science, rock and roll, and natural history. It progressed to ocean life in Maine, independence and immigration in New England, and history and heroics in Philadelphia. It intensified during our two-week stay in Washington, DC, and never ended. Southern coastal areas generated discussions about slavery and the Civil War. Florida and Louisiana were natural classrooms for study and discussion of Spanish explorers, cultural diversity, and environmental issues.

Our incredible weeklong stay at Big Bend National Park in southwest Texas is one example of the educational adventure that characterized our journey. The Sierra del Carmen, the Chisos Mountains, the Chihuahua Desert, and the Rio Grande River provided endless opportunities for discovery and understanding. Knowledge we gained from nature hikes and ranger-led programs at Big Bend proved invaluable to us throughout the journey.

We traveled more than 25,000 miles. Our route took us to 40 states, ocean to ocean, top to bottom. Reading, computer time, Web site building, email, schoolwork, saxophone playing, and major discussions filled the travel hours. Using the Internet to communicate and build our Web site resulted in opportunities to meet interesting people. We became very creative in finding a phone jack for accessing the Internet with our laptop. These

interactions and the educational nature of our project led to many discussions on education, technology, and where it is all headed.

Building the Web site was an education in itself. Organizing, editing, and presenting the material and then learning how to put it all on the Internet was challenging. We hoped our site would give students a practical and interesting place to explore and learn as we provided links to attractions, museums, and events we visited or learned about. As we look back on our magical adventure, we are proud of the risks we took and the opportunity we seized. We revel in the pure joy of learning and experiencing so much of our country together. A few short years ago, our project would not have been possible. The possibilities for the future of technology in education and the role of families therein are infinite.

Learning Experiences

In many ways, our adventure successfully combined current technology, older technology, such as the video camera, and traditional resources, such as reference books, lectures, and hands-on activities.

The five of us spent much of our learning time together. Many of our multisensory learning experiences took place at big-name attractions and popular places, but others occurred spontaneously and naturally along the way.

Computer Use on the Road

In terms of using computers and the Internet on the road, we felt like pioneers, entering and exploring new territory. Progress in technology is at various stages and differs as much from location to location as people do. We often experienced difficulty in finding places where we could hop on the information highway. A librarian at the University of Maine in Portland said, "Maybe the country is not as wired as we think it is." He was right. At home in northern Michigan, local progress and easy access had spoiled us.

In Scarborough, Maine, we found a public library very well equipped and online, but in New Orleans, the public library had not yet begun the process. Minuteman Science and Technology High School in Lexington, Massachusetts, had just built a tremendous computer lab, was in the advanced stages of being wired, and at the time we visited, was preparing to participate in a nationwide Internet Day.

We found only one public modem access location easily, and that was a kiosk in the Honolulu Airport. There you could bring your laptop and connect as easily as using a phone booth. Several hotels have wonderful media rooms with modem access, computers and printers, and fax machines. We used one of those in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Some private RV parks advertise telephone service, and though we thought we would be able to access the Internet at these places, many of them offered phone access only for long-term guests. At three or four campgrounds, we had phone access, and it was a true luxury!

Internet cafes are sprinkled throughout the country—we visited three or four—but some did not have extra phone lines to access. We could work on the Web site and check email through their computers, but they normally charge hourly fees. At two of these cafes, we were treated like royalty, given free online time and a lot of attention because of the interest in our project.

Multimedia stores such as Kinko's did not usually have phone lines available for the laptop, and they charge an hourly fee to use their computers. At the time we stopped in one of these types of stores, they were just installing extra phone lines for modem access.

Lessons Learned

As we traveled and conversed with people, we kept hearing that, in general, students and school staff did not seem to have enough training, access to, or time on computers to browse Web sites such as ours and take advantage of what is offered on the Internet.

From our own school, we heard that computer time was being limited because students were misusing computer access and sufficient supervision was not feasible. We have heard this story countless times; it is a sad situation, but one that can be improved. A unique and wonderful educational resource is not being utilized to its potential.

Some school districts have hired full-time employees to facilitate computer and Internet use, supervise labs, and help staff find efficient ways to use the Internet with their students. Incorporating computer and Internet use in classrooms is a challenge, but it is one we can help each other tackle.

As we traveled, talked and learned, and tried to use all the resources possible during our adventure, we saw many ways in which technology could be used by families, by schools, and by communities in educational endeavors. Although much of what we did was experimental and some of our goals were not wholly realized, many of them were, and we feel the basic concept and ideas were sound.

We have already mentioned how schools, colleges, and businesses can be involved in a project such as ours, and how this kind of adventure could be shared with students all over the world. Educational institutions around the country can take advantage of current and near-future technology by:

- Sharing information more efficiently through mailing lists, Internet resources, and Web sites. Many schools are now online, and students and staff around the world can "compare notes" on countless subjects or conduct cultural exchanges.
- Taking advantage of anyone (student or staff) who travels by allowing students at the school to share travel experiences through technology.
- Allowing students from all backgrounds and in all economic circumstances to share the wonders available on the Internet.

Technology can allow families to spend invaluable time together and strengthen their relationships by:

- Allowing them to take extended trips any time of year, during which children can continue their regular schoolwork and receive credit for nontraditional educational experiences.
- Allowing children to travel extensively with parents whose jobs require travel or can be done on the road.
- Being a way families can spend time together, using software or Internet sources to do research, word processing, and artwork, or visiting educational places via their Web sites.
- Providing opportunities for parents and community members to volunteer in school technology labs and work closely with students.

The first two points are already possible if parents choose to home school their children. But why not create situations wherein schools can also benefit? Schools could receive funding for those students, and everyone could benefit immensely from assignments shared by students at school and students on the road.

Our fundamental thinking about education would have to change substantially, along with traditional funding methods, attendance policies, and assessment procedures, but some changes are already taking place.

From the perspective of a family who traveled the country for nine months with the support of a public school, the future holds infinite possibilities for families and education, with all that technology affords us. We need only to find the ways to open all the doors.

In many ways, our adventure was richer than we had anticipated and turned out better than expected. The school year we spent traveling as a family was more rewarding than imaginable. We spoke with people, in person or by email, from everywhere, in various professions, of all ages and in all stages of life, who had made journeys like ours in their lives or who shared our dream of spending more time with their children. Many of them said that if they had known it was possible, they would have done it.

The message we would like to share is that it can be done. We need to open our eyes and hearts, constantly question what we are doing and why, and use all tools and resources available to make the dreams we imagine come true.

Some Commonly Asked Questions about Our Adventure

How did you decide to make this trip?

Late in the winter of 1995-96, we saw or read something about extensive travel. Our son says it all began when we watched *Bridges of Madison County* and admired the photographer's lifestyle on the road, but our memories fail us on that point.

We thought it would be great to travel the country and show our children the major sights and historical places. We have always believed that if you really want to do something, you find a way. We talked about it a lot and decided that we could do it. Because Mark had recently changed jobs, we were in the process of re-evaluating values, priorities,. and career options. During this time, Mark's father died unexpectedly, and his death confirmed our feelings that nothing is forever and that very few of us get to spend enough time with our quickly growing children. Ours were at perfect ages to handle school on the road for a year and to remember the trip forever. The decision seemed right, and circumstances made the timing ideal. We were also trying to make decisions about school for our children that year, considering moving to a warmer climate, and thinking of returning to college ourselves, so the trip was also about looking for work or possible places to relocate.

How did you manage the expense?

This is an issue most people are curious about. We used our retirement-type savings to fund the adventure. It was and is one of the biggest risks for us, but we think the monetary consequences are worth the experience we had. We kept our house and rented it out for three of the months we were gone. Now we are totally starting over financially. Some aspects of the trip were less expensive than they could have been because we received support from some organizations and free admission to some places we visited.

How did you travel, and how did school on the road go?

We drove and lived in a 34-foot Coachmen class A motor home and towed our minivan. For our desktop computer, we installed a computer station in the motor home. Northwest Academy loaned us the laptop computer and a digital camera (for which Kodak gave a discount) so we could interact with students and teachers and send information and pictures to the Web site. Our children had textbooks and general outlines from school, and they did traditional work in math and language arts. Science, social studies, music, art, and physical wellness fell into place as intrinsic parts of our journey.

How did you all get along in a confined space for that period of time?

Great! We were not as confined as most people imagine. Although we were in the motor home a lot, we were also out of it a lot—sightseeing, exploring, hiking. A few more minor squabbles, along with getting on each other's nerves a little, occurred on the road than would have at home. It was stressful at times, just navigating and accomplishing daily chores, but we knew before we left that our family dynamics and personalities would weather a long adventure.

Young Children and Racism

Debbie A. Reese

volume 4, number 3

Throughout the United States, communities are experiencing heightened levels of tension among racial groups. Canada, our neighbor to the north, is also experiencing racial tension (Esses & Gardner, 1997). Race and racism have figured prominently in news stories such as the Los Angeles riots centered around the Rodney King verdict and, later, the controversy surrounding the O.J. Simpson trial. Concerned with racism in America, in June of 1997, President Clinton established the Presidential Advisory Board on Race. The board has a four-part mission: (1) to facilitate a national dialogue on race; (2) to increase Americans' understanding of race-related issues; (3) to encourage community leaders to develop and implement innovative programs designed to ease racial tensions; and (4) to come up with solutions to problems such as discrimination in housing, health care, and the criminal justice system (Clay, 1997).

Racism is one of America's "hot-button" issues, according to Gail Wyatt, a researcher at the University of California at Los Angeles. Wyatt states that racism is an especially challenging social issue because "it calls into question the very way each of us experiences the world" (Shapiro, 1997, p. 39). The issue is not whether people experience racism, but how they experience it. Clearly, racial issues are in the forefront of our adult minds, but what about our children? What is their understanding of race? Does their understanding affect their behavior?

Although many parents believe their children are oblivious to racial differences, research indicates otherwise. Researcher Phyllis A. Katz has been conducting studies for the past two decades on children's development of racial attitudes. In a recent study, she showed 6-month-old infants several pictures of African Americans and then showed the infants a picture of a white American. The babies looked at the last picture for a significantly longer time, suggesting they were aware of the difference. (The study also included showing infants several pictures of white Americans and then showing them a picture of an African American, with the same result: the babies looked at the last picture for a significantly longer time, indicating they were aware of the difference.) The study was conducted on 100 white infants and 100 African American infants, with the same results. Clearly, Dr. Katz writes, infants as young as 6 months old recognize racial cues, even before they develop language skills (Burnette, 1997).

Howard Fishbein, a researcher at the University of Cincinnati, maintains that from infancy, human beings are naturally predisposed to recognize differences. He says that the ability to discern difference served ancient societies by helping them keep their guard up against outsiders who might hurt or kill them. Research indicates that by the age of 3, children develop a sense of "outsiders"—people who are different from themselves—and because of societal influence, may target those outsiders for prejudicial behaviors (Sleek, 1997).

Many parents believe children develop racial attitudes similar to those held by their parents. Some believe children learn racially tolerant behaviors by observing their parents' positive interactions with people of color and, conversely, learn intolerant behaviors when they hear their parents making negative statements about people of color or see their parents avoiding contact with people of color. Other parents believe that if they do not note differences (taking a "color-blind" stance), or if they do not make negative comments or display behaviors that suggest they wish to avoid contact with people of color, their child will

not develop negative racial attitudes. However, research conducted by Frances Aboud and her colleagues at McGill University indicates that children's racial attitudes do not necessarily reflect the attitudes of their parents (Aboud & Doyle, 1996). Aboud says that remaining silent (as in the "color-blind" stance) on racial issues suggests to children that talking about race is off limits. This silence piques a child's curiosity and can contribute to development of negative attitudes or a feeling of unease around people whose race is different from the child's.

Angela Neal-Barnett, a researcher at Kent State University, suggests that there are three ways in which parents socialize their children with regard to race. In the first approach, parents directly address the realities of racism and help their children identify and feel comfortable about their own racial identity. In the second, parents view racism as a minor component in the socialization of their children and will discuss it when the children raise the issue. The third approach is one in which parents ignore racial issues and guide their children to focus on personal qualities of an individual such as confidence, ambition, and respect. This approach, which makes sense on many levels, is actually the most problematic for children's levels of anxiety. In her study, Neal-Barnett interviewed African American children who had been socialized in one of the three ways and found that children whose parents chose to ignore race and focus on personal qualities had the highest levels of anxiety in their social interactions, regardless of the race of the people with whom they were interacting (DeAngelis, 1997).

Many educators and psychologists have developed programs to address racism. Beverly Tatum and Phyllis Brown, researchers at the University of Massachusetts, have developed a program that brings a group of racially mixed children in elementary school together after school hours for a period of seven weeks. In the early weeks of the program, children are grouped by race to discuss their own identity issues. Partway through the program, children are reassigned to a racially mixed group, and discussions about racial issues continue. Parent groups meet once a month to discuss racism and learn how they can discuss racism with their children. This approach, bringing children together in small groups to work together on a specific task, is commonly known as cooperative learning. Howard Fishbein believes that this approach may be one of the best ways to help children offset their prejudices toward classmates of other races. Children come to see themselves as teammates, as "insiders" rather than "outsiders." They learn to encourage each other's participation, to listen to each other's ideas, and to disagree respectfully instead of derisively. Fishbein suggests that the widespread use of this strategy may produce a generation of children who grow to adulthood actively seeking commonalities across culture and race, rather than differences (Sleek, 1997). Observations of kindergarten classrooms in which the children were from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds found no episodes of interracial or intraracial tension (Holmes, 1995).

Aboud and Doyle (1996) conducted a study in which third- and fourth-grade children were paired with a friend who had a different level of prejudice and were asked to talk about race. The attitudes of children who, on a pre-test, had the highest levels of prejudice were changed most by the discussion with their friend. This finding adds to the literature that suggests that open and honest discussions of race are necessary to change negative attitudes.

Many men and women of different racial and ethnic groups fall in love and marry. Their children are multiracial. The U.S. Census Bureau indicated that in 1990, there were at least two million people who identified themselves as multiracial. These individuals may opt to identify with the race of both parents, or with one or the other at different times. Often, these children feel like outsiders. It is crucial that parents of multiracial children engage their children in discussions about race and actively work to help them develop strong self-esteem, according to Francis Wardle, the director of the Center for the Study of Biracial Children (Sullivan, 1998).

One way parents can open discussions with their children is by reading children's books about other cultures. In *Nappy Hair*, by Carolivia Herron, Brenda's family talks about her hair, which is the nappiest, curliest, and twistiest hair in the whole family. This book about an African American family can lead to a discussion about differences in

appearance. In *Bird Talk,* by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, the discussion focuses on how a Native American family deals with a little girl's feelings when her schoolmates tease her about being Indian. In *Everybody Eats Rice,* by Norah Dooley, a young child is sent out to call her brother to dinner. She visits many homes in her neighborhood as she searches for him and sees the ways families from different cultures prepare rice for dinner. She learns that not only Asian Americans eat rice. This book can lead to a discussion about food across cultures. Arnold Adoff's book *Black Is Brown Is Tan* is about two children in a multiracial family.

In addition to actively seeking children's books about other cultures, parents can also begin looking critically at characters in their children's favorite television programs and children's books. These characters often reflect stereotypical ways of thinking about Native Americans. For example, in *Clifford's Halloween,* Clifford the Big Red Dog is shown wearing an Indian headdress and smoking a peace pipe. Parents can open a discussion with their child and help them understand that, today, Native American children wear jeans and sneakers, ride bikes, and play computer games (Reese, 1996).

Children are not color blind; they recognize differences. Children develop racial attitudes based on their observations of their parents and society in general. Discussions about race do change attitudes. Vonnie McLoyd of Duke University encourages parents to begin talking honestly with their children about racial issues (Burnette, 1997).

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The Parenting Education Spectrum[1]

Anne S. Robertson

volume 4 number 6

Lisbeth Schorr, in her new book *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America*, expands on the Seven Attributes of Highly Effective Programs. Those attributes include:

- Successful programs are comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering.
- Successful programs see children in the context of their families.
- Successful programs deal with families as parts of neighborhoods and communities.
- Successful programs have a long-term preventative orientation, a clear mission, and continue to evolve over time.
- Successful programs are well managed by competent and committed individuals with clearly identifiable skills.
- Staffs of successful programs are trained and supported to provide high-quality, responsive services.
- Successful programs operate in settings that encourage practitioners to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

At ERIC and the National Parent Information Network (NPIN), we continue to examine better ways to serve parents and professionals who work with parents, given our mission and the resources available to us. What can we do? What are our limits?

Certainly, information gathering, storing, and sharing are the foundation of the ERIC system and NPIN, but a cornerstone of that foundation is collaboration with a wide variety of individuals, agencies, and organizations. We work very hard to listen to what is needed in the field, and our acquisitions, services, and projects are developed to support those information and resource needs.

One of those services, Parents AskERIC, has grown rapidly and has challenged us to look at the level of parent support we can and cannot provide well from our location. Through Parents AskERIC, parents, or professionals who work with parents, ask a wide variety of questions on topics such as child development, parenting education, health, or school-related issues (see Figure 1).

sibling rivalry	parental involvement
toilet training	special needs children
divorce	father involvement
custody issues	home schooling
benchmarks in child development	retention issues
aggressive behavior	family communication
positive discipline	adolescent behavior
program development	substance abuse
choosing a school	health-related issues
resources for gifted children	family literacy

Figure 1. Parenting question topics.

Each question receives an individual response, which typically includes citations from our database, a list of relevant parenting materials and organizations, and encouragement to link to community-based resources. With over 50,000 parenting education programs available throughout the United States (Carter, 1996, p. 4), it has been helpful for us to identify those programs by using what we have called "The Parenting Education

[1] Originally published as "The Parenting Education Spectrum: A Look at the Scope of Parenting Programs That Should Be Available within a Community."

Spectrum" (see Figure 2). As we respond to parenting questions, we can look at how that response fits into the spectrum, being careful not to move beyond our scope and mission.

The spectrum may also help communities understand what support is currently being provided and where there may be gaps in service delivery. Identifying those weak areas, through a community-wide needs assessment, may be useful for designating the parenting support services that may be most needed within a neighborhood.

Resource and Referral	Suggestion/Strategies	Community Programs	Formal Instruction	Counseling
• Research • Books • Organizations • Web sites • Full text	suggesting a phrase or strategy to assist the parent or professional	informal programs offered through schools, hospitals, religious groups (e.g., MOPS)	formal programs offered through school districts, hospitals (e.g., early intervention)	counseling & one-to-one support for parents (e.g., home visiting)

Figure 2. Parenting education spectrum.

The spectrum is divided into five major sections. At the left end of the spectrum are programs that provide information, resource, and referral. As we move along the spectrum, we see that the programs in the next section may provide a strategy or suggestion to the parent. In the middle are informal parenting programs that may be run by volunteers and may meet in community locations, such as a church, synagogue, or family center. These informal programs are important networks that support families and build relationships. As we move to the other end of the spectrum, we see that the parenting education gradually becomes more intensive and one-to-one, until at the opposite end are programs that include such models as home visiting and counseling.

While all parents may need access to the entire spectrum of parenting education during their parenting experience, it is very difficult for one organization to provide the complete range of services effectively. ERIC and the National Parent Information Network fit into the far left side of the spectrum by providing information, resources, and referrals. We may also suggest a strategy and, if necessary, try and provide parents with a link to a program within their own community that fits into another category in the parenting education spectrum. From our location, it is impossible for us to provide the type of support required for more intensive parenting education. These types of services are best accomplished by community-based programs because the staff can develop a one-to-one relationship with the family. Our hope is that by increasing access to relevant, high-quality research and resources, at the time the resources are most needed, parents and professionals who work with parents will become more competent in their roles and feel more capable when reaching out to help others within their community.

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Talking to Children about Sexuality and AIDS

Eva Lefkowitz and Terry Au

volume 4, number 7

In this month's Parent News *feature, Lefkowitz and Au discuss children, sexuality, and AIDS. As reported in* Education Daily *(Volume 31, No. 88, page 2), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently issued a statement that said AIDS education should be a mandatory requirement for high school graduation. The AAP further recommended that all college students in teacher training programs be required to take a course in HIV/AIDS education. Clearly, discussion of AIDS is necessary in today's society, but parents are often reluctant to engage their children in a discussion of the issue. In their article, Lefkowitz and Au share how parents can begin these very important discussions with their children.*

I am playing "rough house" with my 5-year-old nephew. He jumps on top of me, stares deeply in my eyes, tries to kiss me on the mouth, and says, "Aunt Eva, let's have sex." As someone who has been studying parent–child communication about sexuality for several years, I responsibly . . . burst out laughing, run out of the room, and say to my sister, "Do you know what your son just said to me?"

Talking to children about sex can be one of the more difficult conversations we have. Often, parents would feel more comfortable having an argument with their children than having to talk about sexuality. Obviously, even those of us who are supposed "experts" in the field have difficulty dealing with it in real life.

Think back to your first conversation with your parents about sex. Was it a relaxed, open discussion where you felt comfortable asking questions and your parents provided candid responses with little embarrassment? No? Was it a tense, stilted conversation in which your parent seemed clearly uncomfortable? A lecture to you about the dangers of sex? Or was the topic never even broached, evasive answers given when you tried to ask questions about it?

Most of us remember what our parents did and didn't tell us about sexuality. And these conversations—direct, indirect, or nonexistent—send us messages about sexuality from an early age. They tell us whether it is okay to talk about sexuality, whether sexuality is something we should feel comfortable about, or whether we should be embarrassed to even think about it. These messages may stay with us for a long time and may affect what messages we then pass on to our own children about sexuality.

These days, most parents feel that they want to talk to their children about sexuality. With the AIDS epidemic staring us all in the face, parents worry that not talking to their children about sex may have life-threatening consequences. In fact, research tells us that talking to children about sexuality and AIDS can only help. It leads to improved knowledge, and some evidence suggests that it can lead to changes in beliefs, or even more responsible behavior, such as abstaining from sex or using condoms when sexually active. However, many parents feel at a loss as to how to discuss these delicate topics. If conversations between two adults about sexuality are likely to result in giggles, how then can one begin to discuss these topics with children and adolescents?

There are several things that parents can do to make discussing sexuality and AIDS easier, more relaxed, and more useful for themselves and their children.

Tip #1: Lay the Groundwork Early

Parents can help children feel comfortable discussing these issues at an early age. From the beginning, parents, through both explicit and implicit cues, send messages about what is okay to discuss within the family. If when your child asks "Where do babies come from?" you act embarrassed and uncomfortable, farming the answer out to your spouse, you are sending your child a message that it is inappropriate to talk about such things, that asking such questions makes people feel uncomfortable, and that the next time he or she has a question, maybe they should keep it to themselves. If instead you answer honestly, perhaps giggling a little bit while explaining this to your child (in a way appropriate to your child's age, of course), you are teaching your child that talking about these things is okay.

Tip #2: Take Advantage of Children's Curiosity, or "Seize the Moment"

Young children often ask questions related to sexuality. These moments are often more natural times for talking about these issues than sitting down for a "let's talk about sex" conversation. We can use our children's early curiosity as a way to stimulate conversation. Take the example of my sister and her son. My sister was able to use his obvious curiosity to bring up the topic of sexuality. She asked him where he had learned about sex ("from the movies"). She asked him what sex was ("when two people love each other a real lot and they do things together, like kissing and hugging and smooching"). And then she had an opportunity to talk to him about when sexual behavior is appropriate and when it is not. From this conversation, my nephew learned much more than the actual words that my sister spoke. He also learned that talking about sex is okay, and that if he wanted to ask his mother questions in the future, he could do so without embarrassment and would receive honest answers.

Tip #3: Separate AIDS from Sex

People often forget that talking about AIDS does not have to involve discussions of sex. Starting around age 2 or 3, children become very curious about why things happen and how things work. This curiosity includes biological things, such as germs and disease. Therefore, from an early age parents can talk to their children about AIDS transmission without discussing the mechanics of sex. Instead, parents can explain to children that the AIDS virus thrives in some body fluids (e.g., blood), can stay alive but does not multiply rapidly in others (e.g., saliva), and dies virtually instantly and becomes harmless when exposed to air, water, and so on. So, it's important not to touch other people's blood (e.g., from a bloody nose or cuts). Saliva that has been exposed to air does not seem to transmit living AIDS. In fact, sneezing, coughing, and even sharing a drinking glass have not been found to cause AIDS. However, it is important to keep in mind that saliva does transmit other diseases—some very serious (e.g., hepatitis, mononucleosis), and some less serious (e.g., cold, flu). By discussing these issues, parents can teach their children about the mechanisms of the AIDS virus before they feel ready to talk about sexual intercourse.

As children get older and learn about sexual intercourse, they can use their knowledge that the AIDS virus can thrive in sexual fluids to reason about how AIDS is transmitted through sex. However, there is one precaution here. I have noticed recently that many teens know that you can get AIDS through sexual intercourse, but they are very confused about the mechanism. For instance, in response to the question "How do you get AIDS from sex?" an 11-year-old girl said, "When you have sex, you share blood, and the AIDS virus, um, travels through the blood and it can go into another person." This answer shows the danger of partial information. She has tried to piece together information about blood (HIV lives in blood) and about sex (you can get AIDS from sex), but has incorrectly filled in the gaps in her knowledge. This child may then erroneously think that as long as there is no blood involved during sex, she will be safe from AIDS.

Tip #4: Don't Wait Too Long to Talk about Sex

Some people may think that age 11 is too young to talk to a child about sexuality. Often, parents first

begin to talk about sex after an event in their child's life triggers the discussion: the child begins puberty, the child gets a boyfriend/girlfriend, parents find a condom in the child's room. The problem with waiting for an event in the child's life is that this moment may be too late. We know from research that communication about sex between parents and teens is more likely to affect teens' attitudes and behaviors at younger ages and when teens are not yet sexually active. Therefore, it is important to talk to your children about sexuality before you view it as necessary.

Tip #5: Ask Open-Ended Questions and Probe Gently

Many rules of general communication with children and adolescents also apply when talking about sexuality and AIDS. First, children do not respond well to one-sided lectures. Often, children will "tune out" these conversations and therefore will not absorb much of this information.

In addition, it is important that parents try to encourage their children's participation in these conversations. Many parents fall into the habit of asking "did you know" questions, such as, "Did you know that you can get AIDS from having sex?" These types of questions leave little room for interaction or involvement in conversations. Children learn quickly that they need only answer "yes" to these types of questions, and that mom or dad will quickly move on to a new topic. A better type of question is an open-ended one, such as, "How is it that someone can get AIDS from sex?" or "What can you do to prevent getting AIDS from having sex?" With these questions, children are required to become active participants in the conversation, and parents are able to learn what their children do and do not know, making it easier to provide children with more information in the areas that they have less knowledge.

If your child seems to answer your questions with short responses, you can try to probe their answers. For instance, "You say that a condom can prevent the spread of AIDS. Why does using a condom help?" In this way, you can make sure that your child understands the transmission of the virus and has not simply memorized facts about it.

Tip #6: Share Your Personal Experiences

When talking about sexuality in particular, parents often find that telling their children something personal about themselves makes their children feel more comfortable talking about sexuality. It does not mean that parents have to tell children every detail about their sex lives, but rather that parents show their children that they respect them enough to share details about their own lives. It could be something lighthearted such as describing the first time that mom and dad kissed during a discussion of first kisses, or it could be something more related to views on premarital sex, such as explaining why mom and dad waited until they were married to have sex.

Tip #7: Become a Gossip and a Movie Critic

Finally, some parents tell me that whenever they try to talk to their child about sex, he or she always clams up. Mothers will tell me, "I try to ask her if she's had sex yet, but she never will answer me." Parents need to understand that children, particularly teenagers, often have a hard time talking to their parents about personal things. Therefore, when parents ask a 13- or 15-year-old to discuss his or her own sexuality, the child may feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. Instead, an easier way to discuss these issues with a reluctant teenager is to talk about less personal things. For instance, parents can ask whether the child thinks that many of his or her classmates have had sex or have kissed someone.

Parents can also use television programs and movies as a way to talk about these issues. Many parents have had the experience of going to a movie or watching a television show during which they realized that it contained sexually mature themes. Instead of ignoring the content that you and your child have already seen, you can use the experience as an opportunity to discuss whether it was appropriate for that character to have sex with her boyfriend. What could she have done to say no? Why might she have not been ready for sex? If parents watch programs aimed at teenagers (e.g., *Dawson's Creek, Party of Five*) with their teenage children, they will be aware of what their children

are seeing, and they can use these opportunities as discussion starting points. Children are often more willing to discuss the relative merits of Sara having sex with Bailey than whether they should have sex with their own boyfriend or girlfriend.

In addition, parents can provide their children with information about sexuality and AIDS. Giving children pamphlets, videotapes, or books about these issues can provide a starting point for discussions. The hope is not to replace conversation with written material, but instead to use the written material as a way to stimulate conversation between parents and adolescents.

Talking about sexuality and AIDS is certainly not simple, but parents should remain hopeful that these conversations will make a difference. Although more schools are incorporating AIDS and sex education into the curriculum, parents bring the unique perspective of their own values and ideas into these conversations. Parents should seize natural opportunities—their child's curiosity, television and movies, etc.—to begin talking about these sensitive issues. Sending a message early on that it's okay for your child to talk to you about sexuality will help insure that he or she continues to go to you with questions and feels comfortable discussing these issues.

Note: This article has intentionally avoided telling parents what they should discuss with their children because it is such a personal issue. Some of the resources listed below under "For More Information" cover what topics parents may want to discuss with their children.

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Internet: http://npin.org

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National AIDS Hotline: 800-342-2437

Web Sites

Please note: Searching for topics such as "sexuality" on the Internet can be a treacherous business, as I learned while looking for relevant sites. All of the sites below are intelligently written and aimed at teenagers. However, be very careful if you decide to search the Web for more information with your children present.

Coalition for Positive Sexuality (aimed at teenagers)
http://www.positive.org/cps/Home/index.html

Health Risk Factors for Adolescents
http://education.indiana.edu/cas/adol/risk.html

Mediconsult.com (a site that lists books about sexuality and AIDS that are appropriate for children of different ages)
http://www.mediconsult.com/aids/shareware/health

Sexuality and Your Child—For children ages 3 to 7
http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/humanrel/gh6002.htm

Community Spotlights

Families Learning Together: The Strength of Family Literacy

Anne S. Robertson

volume 2, number 11

"I passed!" Tina said. "My score wasn't as high as I had hoped, but at least I have it." Tina had just passed her General Equivalency Diploma (GED) exam and earned her high school diploma. She had reason to be proud of her accomplishment—Tina had been one of the 90 million American adults who have low literacy skills. For people like Tina, the lack of education makes it difficult to contribute fully to society.

Tina's story is similar to the experience of many other people who did not finish high school as teenagers. Feeling lonely and lost during early adolescence, Tina regularly skipped class by hiding in the bathrooms at her school. Interestingly, her absence was rarely noted by her teachers; by her mid-teens, when she should have been in high school, she had stopped attending completely. Ten years later, Tina was working part-time and was also a caring, single mother of a little girl. However, Tina wanted to do something more to improve both her self-esteem and her income earning potential. A new family literacy program in her area helped her realize her goals by providing a home visitor who encouraged and tutored her and who connected her with an adult education program in her area. Passing her GED was a major goal in her family literacy process. Tina now hopes to continue her education next year, when her daughter is in school full-time.

Family literacy is a new approach to this difficult cycle of educational and economic deprivation. Successful programs that break this cycle of poverty are comprehensive, intensive, and flexible enough to meet local and individual needs. They focus on prevention, and they work with children in the context of their families and with families in the context of their communities.

The family literacy philosophy is built upon the idea that parents and children can learn and succeed together. It looks at literacy across generations and works with children and their parents, recognizing the strengths and mutual support that a family can bring to an educational program when parents and children come to the program together.

Family literacy projects typically identify eligible families for the program as having some of the following characteristics:

- the family has at least one adult with literacy-related needs, such as the lack of a high school diploma or English as the second language;
- the family has at least one child between the ages of birth and 7 years; and
- the family lives within a reasonable distance of the core services being provided through the project.

Eligible families who enter the project commit to participating in an integrated educational approach with four major components. These components are:

- adult education, which may range from basic skills to new computer skills required for the workplace;
- early childhood education, which provides developmentally appropriate experiences to assist children's continuing success in education;

- parent education and support, which helps adults become more effective parents; and
- parent–child interaction time, which is a specific time when a child and parent learn and play together.

Another building block of the family literacy philosophy is that programmatic decisions are based on the family strengths model (Potts, 1994). This model is based on the following assumptions:

- parents are the first and most important teachers in their child's life;
- families, even those considered "at risk," have strengths and positive coping skills that they can develop;
- families can recover from crisis and adversity; and
- families can address their own needs and growth through improved literacy.

Family literacy projects also have the flexibility to implement these core components and building blocks through a combination of techniques. For example, home visitors, or specially trained educators, visit the home of the family on a weekly basis. The home visitor works to establish trust with a family that may be isolated from the community. Once trust is established, the home visitor assists the family with setting goals for adult education, the child's education, and parenting skills. The home visitor then continues to help the family with achieving those specified goals while connecting the family to the appropriate support systems within their community.

The home visiting model is frequently linked with a successful school-based program such as the Keenan model. This structured approach brings the family to the school building during regular hours so that parents can attend an adult education class while the child attends a preschool class. Later, the parent and child have lunch together and perhaps participate in a nutrition class. Parent and child separate again for afternoon activities, which may include job training or career development activities for the parent and additional preschool activities for the child.

Research on family literacy programs is still in the early stages, but the outcomes are promising. According to the National Center on Family Literacy, a follow-up study on the Keenan model completed one year after participation showed gains in the following areas (*When Families Learn Together,* n.d., pp. 4-7):

- 90% of children were ready for kindergarten;
- 10% of the parents had increased their level of employment; and
- 50% or more of the adults were involved in continuing education or were employed.

Other gains were reported in children, including a higher motivation for learning, improved classroom behavior, and improved self-confidence. There was also an increase in parental participation.

Karen Mundie from the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council is hoping for similar if not greater gains from her family literacy program. Developed in partnership with two existing preschools, the program is located in a public housing community. The preschool staff was trained in the four family literacy components as well as the techniques for home visiting. The program is funded through a capital campaign and foundation grants. Approximately 25 local families participate in the core integrated services.

Karen also points out that they were fortunate in Pittsburgh to have the support of other schools in the community. For example, on Fridays, the parents in their program volunteer at the elementary school, allowing the parents to learn valuable job skills as well as support their school-age child. The adults also attend a career exploration program at the local community college that examines various job-related opportunities and the education or experiences the positions require.

A fundamental principle of the Pittsburgh program is found in excellent family literacy programs across the country. In these programs, the educator respects the family, meets the family where they are, and then lets the family move forward to greater economic independence and family confidence. Through family literacy programs, the cycle of poverty can be broken, one family at a time.

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For More Information

The Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC)
Donald G. Black, Executive Director
or Karen Mundie
100 Sheridan Sq.
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National Center for Family Literacy
Waterfront Plaza, Suite 200
325 W. Main St.
Louisville, KY 40202
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ERIC/REC and the Family Literacy Center
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Family Centers: Community Concern Put into Positive Action

Anne S. Robertson

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It is 9:20 on a typical morning at the Healthy Universal Beginnings (HUB) family center in New Hampshire. Under the guidance of their teachers, 15 preschool children are playing in the 2 brightly equipped classrooms. Their parents and one grandparent are gathered in the next room to hear a guest speaker. Several months ago, parents had recommended topics and speakers for their morning meetings. Their suggestions included positive parenting, special education, home decorating and budgeting, starting a home business, and hosting a regular parent support group. This particular morning, the subject is nutrition and healthy meals with a guest speaker from the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

HUB is one example of community concern put into positive action. Founded over three years ago by people representing a cross-section of the local population, including the hospital, clergy, school district, Head Start, local preschools, and parents, this collaborative group formed a Ready to Learn Task Force and initiated HUB as a way to support young parents and children within this New Hampshire community. The center has grown from hosting a meeting one morning a week with a few mothers and children to its current program with over 100 regular participants weekly. The center is now open four days a week and at least one evening. It has a core administrative staff along with family literacy home visitors, an adult education specialist, and a homeless family specialist. The center has grown so quickly that it hopes to have a new site by the end of the year to accommodate and expand current programming.

Across the country, family resource centers like HUB are springing up in various locations, such as schools, libraries, churches, or recreation centers. When they are developed by local families and professionals and are given enough financial support, they have great flexibility to serve the community, particularly its "high-risk" families. Not only is the family center idea growing, but so is financial support for this concept. The U.S. Department of Education has funding available for projects like family resource centers through its Goals 2000 money and Title 1/Chapter 1. Larger family centers are typically funded by a collage of federal, state, and local agencies.

Increasingly, state agencies are assisting with the coordination and development of local family centers. In Connecticut in 1988, for example, the state legislature allocated money to pilot three Family Resource Centers. By September 1996, the number of centers in Connecticut had increased to at least 28. Combined federal and state funding for these centers has exceeded $2.5 million.

Guiding the movement for Connecticut is a vision of "strengthening effective management practice and establishing a continuum of child care and support services that children and parents need" (*Family Resource Center,* n.d.). This model strives for the following seven components:

- Full-time preschool child care
- School-age child care
- Families in training
- Adult education
- Support and training for family day care providers
- Positive youth development services

- Resource and referral services

Although each family center has a unique mission that reflects the nature of the community, one goal they have in common is "connection." Successful family centers consistently cross boundaries to serve individual families and connect them with the greater community. Families that are connected to local support systems are less at risk for many problems, including school failure and abuse.

This connection can be initiated in a large or small way. The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships has the following recommendations for starting a family center in your school (Johnson, n.d.):

- Get parents involved—offer coffee and doughnuts and welcome younger siblings.
- Get the principal involved—include him or her in all meetings.
- Find a space—remember that size is less important than the purpose.
- Make it comfortable—ask for donations of couch, tables, and a coffee pot.
- Staff the center—recruit a volunteer or pay a parent from the community.
- Don't give up—remember that change takes time.

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http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm

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Providing Services for Teen Parents: An Innovative Approach in Portland, Oregon

Mary Karter

volume 3, number 2

We frequently receive requests at the National Parent Information Network for resources and information on programs for teen parents. Preliminary data indicate that nationwide there is a slight decline in the teen birth rate (Facts at a Glance, 1996). While this trend is encouraging, the critical consequences of teen childbearing continue to put this issue at the forefront for educators and health care providers in their program development. There appears to be a direct relationship between early childbearing and one or several of the following: poor school performance, poor health and reduced access to health care, less supportive home environments, and higher rates of poverty and incarceration. Without appropriate intervention for individual teen parents and their families, it is likely that these consequences are, or will become, multigenerational (Facts at a Glance, 1996). Changing these patterns will take a strong, comprehensive effort of the resources within the community, including health care, social services, and education. According to a report by the Center for Assessment and Policy Development, programs "must intervene early in the lives of teen parents and their children to strengthen the resilience and responsibility of these young families, rather than waiting until problems arise or they begin to rely on public assistance" (School-Based Programs for Adolescent Parents and Their Young Children, 1994, p. iii). This month's Community Spotlight provides a model of one teen parent program located in Portland, Oregon. In addition, the Spotlight article provides more information on resources and organizations that may be able to assist in program development for teen parents. Our guest author for the Community Spotlight, Mary Karter, is available to respond to questions or provide ideas for program development within your community. The work of many professionals who are serving this population is greatly appreciated, and we hope that the resources provided in this month's Community Spotlight will be useful for addressing the critical needs of teen parents in your community.

Teen Parent Services in Portland, Oregon, provides educational and support services to pregnant and parenting students in a variety of school settings, including a special teen parent class offered at regular high schools. A strong emphasis is placed on learning life skills that all teens and parents must have, such as conflict resolution, coping skills, and managing personal finances. Weekly support groups and parenting skills groups enrich the classroom experience for students. Liaisons work closely with other staff in the school and with community agencies to advocate for the support students need to be successful as students and as parents.

There are two alternative settings within Teen Parent Services. The first program is called PIVOT (Partners in Vocational Opportunities Training), a partnership between the Job Corps and Portland Public Schools. The model was developed for an older, welfare-receiving nonpregnant teen parent (between the ages of 17 and 21) who has dropped out of school and wishes to re-enter, complete her or his GED or diploma, and receive job training.

The second alternative, called the Monroe Program, is a transitional educational setting for pregnant students who will be returning to their home school after the birth of the baby. It also includes young mothers who wish to earn their GED.

Students receive parenting education in addition to their regular classes. A full-time social worker and case manager are available for students' social service needs. Also available for students in Teen Parent Services is the Teen Summer Program. This six-week program helps students earn credits, increase basic skills, and receive work experience.

In November of 1995, Portland Public Schools Teen Parent Services (PPS/TPS) was selected by the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD) as one of two strong school-based teen parent programs in the country. CAPD is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to improve the self-sufficiency of disadvantaged children, adolescents, and families. Also provided, through CAPD, is strategic planning, program design, and evaluation assistance.

The PPS school district was asked to participate in CAPD's School-Based Initiative for Adolescent Parents and Their Children. The funding for this program was provided by the Vira I. Heinz Endowment, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Foundation for Child Development. This initiative has given PPS an opportunity to work closely with our community partners to improve and expand services to pregnant and parenting teens. The program assessment and planning done through the funding from CAPD have helped us identify a variety of areas that need attention. Our first area for attention is providing equitable services for all students.

Toward this goal, PPS operated three child care centers during the 1995-96 school year. A total of 86 students used on-site child care this year. Funding sources for on-site child care were Adult and Family Services; Multnomah County Office for Children, Youth and Families; and a Child Care Development Block Grant. Keeping slots full and bringing in enough revenue to keep centers open continue to be major challenges for Teen Parent Services. Funding for the 1995-96 school year required elimination of 10 slots of on-site child care (from 52 to 42). The grant amounts still do not cover the actual cost of providing this service. Quarterly meetings will continue to be held between Teen Parent Services staff and funding partners.

Another initiative that provides health care to the teen parent population as well as to other parents is the Screening Kids/Informing Parents (SKIP) program. This program provides screening and assessment of infants and toddlers to find out who needs a referral for additional screening or for early intervention. Of the 140 infants/toddlers screened by SKIP, 44 were found to have some kind of problem. Additional screening was suggested for 37% of those children screened, and appropriate early intervention programs could be introduced for individual children. The program was initially funded by the PPS school district but was recently reduced because of budget cuts. However, with the effort of volunteers, the SKIP program has continued.

For more information on Teen Parent Services, contact Mary Karter, Portland Public Schools, Monroe Building, 2508 NE Everett, Portland, OR 97232; telephone: 503-916-5858, ext. 410.

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For More Information

Center for Assessment and Policy Development
111 Presidential Blvd., Suite 234
Bala Cynwyd, PA 10004
Telephone: 610-664-4540

The Center also publishes *School-Based Programs for Adolescent Parents and Their Young Children.*

Vida Health Communications
6 Bigelow St.
Cambridge, MA 02139
Telephone: 617-864-7862
Email: VidaHealth@aol.com

Vida Health Communications video resources include: PROJECT FUTURE, a comprehensive, three-program video series addressing the needs of adolescent parents.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
2100 M St., NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037
Telephone: 202-857-8655

This campaign is developing resources, media, and public relations programs to increase the public's understanding of teen pregnancy. Its primary goal is to prevent teen pregnancy and specifically to reduce the teenage pregnancy rate by one-third by the year 2005.

The National Center for Fathering
10200 W. 75th St., Suite 267
Shawnee Mission, KS 66204
Telephone: 913-384-4661
Internet: http://www.fathers.com

This center provides a variety of resources and publications for fathers. It is currently working on a collaborative project with the Community Foundation of Central Florida designed to gather baseline information on the attitudes, behaviors, and support needs of teen fathers in the Orlando, Florida, area.

Concerned Black Men, Inc.
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Washington, DC 20005
Telephone: 202-783-5414

Concerned Black Men is a national nonprofit organization with affiliate chapters in at least eight cities. Male volunteers provide positive role models to young men and build improved channels of communication between adults and children through programs and activities promoting educational, cultural, and social development.

DADS Teen Father Program
County of San Diego, Dept. of Social Services
7065 Broadway, Suite 200
Lemon Grove, CA 91945
Telephone: 619-668-3940

The DADS Teen Father program is a collaboration of three organizations providing comprehensive services to teen fathers. The program works with young fathers, ages 14 to 21, to increase their parenting skills, reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancies, and assist them in preparing for careers, thus enabling them to be financially responsible for their children.

Building Family-Community Traditions

Debbie A. Reese

volume 3, number 3

This month, Community Spotlight departs from the format used in past issues. In this edition, we introduce the notion that, often, families in communities across the country engage in activities that are not based on intervention by concerned leaders or community agencies but, instead, are based on activities whose roots are in traditions handed down from one generation to the next. Typically, these traditions are not intended to address a problem but seem to have as a foundation the desire to encourage unity and cohesion among members of the family or community. This motivation may exist at a very subtle level of awareness or at a very explicit level of awareness. Regardless, these activities help members connect with each other in ways that help form bonds members can count on for support. To begin, we share with our readers the experiences of NPIN team member, Debbie Reese.

I have a fond memory that I think of from time to time. In my mind's eye, I can see my grandfather, grinning at me, with a big chunk of mud on part of his teeth, lips, and face. "Mud?!" you may exclaim. Let me explain…

I am Pueblo Indian from one of the small Pueblos north of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Visitors to New Mexico often remark that the homes there seem to rise right out of the earth. In a certain sense, they do. Constructed of adobe, homes are made of materials that frequently come from just a few feet away from the site of the home.

As a child, I was part of a large, extended family. Both sets of grandparents were a big part of my life, as were cousins, uncles, and aunts. Many homes in the Pueblo and Hispanic communities of New Mexico started out as single-room structures, large enough to provide shelter for a husband and wife. As children were born, other rooms were added on to provide additional space. These homes feel odd to visitors—they don't have any hallways! Just one room after another.

At times, an ambitious family might work together to build an entirely new home. This process was a significant part of my childhood. Together, we picked a spot across the road from my grandparents' home and began making adobes. This involved—very simply—digging a hole in the ground about 200 feet from the chosen site for the new home. To the clay soil, we added sand, straw, and water. We mixed the adobe mud, pressed it into wooden frames, and left the wet bricks to dry in the sun. Each weeknight evening when my father returned home, we would gather to make another batch of adobes. On a productive summer evening, we could make nearly 300 bricks. Everyone took part in this activity—from my 2-year-old sister (who mostly played in the mud and water) to my grandfather (who worked fairly steadily). At times, frivolity would strike, and rather than make adobes, we would all engage in mud-slinging, mud-and-water fights.

This home-building activity was important in many ways. We worked together, side by side, from the youngest to the oldest. Everyone had a role; everyone contributed to the process; everyone was significant. In addition to this valuing of the individual parts of the extended family, we were learning important skills and developing important dispositions.

It would not be fair to tell this story without noting that a project of this magnitude can create stress and angry feelings among individuals. There were times I would have preferred to read a novel or

watch television, and I was not allowed to do so. To some, it may be construed as dictatorial child labor. The lessons learned, however, about group membership and support are significant to cultural groups—they ensure their survival.

The key factor in this building activity is the togetherness aspect of the work. It doesn't take a community to build a house; it can be built by a contractor. But building a home as a family, extended family, or community has the potential to strengthen bonds as participants learn to support and depend on each other.

The Families Book: True Stories about Real Kids and the People They Live With and Love (Erlbach, 1996) includes a chapter written by a farm family. On a farm, families often work together and share responsibilities. Twelve-year-old Sean writes of the joy he feels helping plant vegetables and herbs and selling them to local restaurants. Fourteen-year-old D.C. writes about their other business—raising collie dogs. He talks of caring for newborn puppies and how it can be emotionally difficult to sell them after caring for and growing attached to them. However, over time, this commitment to working together as a family and community develops more effective relationships and builds stronger communities.

Similar activities take place in families and communities across the United States. Perhaps they are not of the same magnitude, but magnitude is not the key factor. For example, many neighborhoods organize annual street potlucks in which they close both ends of their street for an evening of festivity. The families come together in the street to share food, games, and friendship. They learn about each other and form bonds that support them in times of need or times of joy.

These types of activities can also be used to build cohesiveness in a school environment. Building a new playground can allow each person to play a significant role. Children can assist with the playground's design, while parents, children, teachers, and community members can come together on specific "work days" to construct the site. This activity worked so well for a school in New Hampshire that several years later they expanded their playground so that new families in the school would feel that same sense of cohesiveness.

Other examples can be seen in the traditional activities families take part in at holidays or other celebrations specific to their home culture. At family gatherings, stories from times spent together are told and retold. These stories join with the activity to serve as an element that holds the family together. Wolff (1993) notes that family stories promote family awareness, intergenerational sharing, an understanding of family and self, and an appreciation for the uniqueness of the family. Stories link past, current, and future generations together, shaping and building the family's heritage.

Perhaps in recognition of the importance of building community, the Institute for the Study of Civil Values set out to help neighborhoods develop plans to improve the neighborhood. The program, called the Social Contract Project, has successfully implemented several projects in Pennsylvania. In Queen Village, a South Philadelphia neighborhood, the Queen Village Social Contract called for a new plan to establish a partnership with local schools, provide a summer day-camp for kids, and implement an adult literacy program. Each goal was achieved, and groups in the neighborhood have been working together since.

Sources

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Wolff, L. O. (1993, November). *Family narrative: How our stories shape us.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Miami Beach, FL. ED 368 002.

For More Information

The Social Contract Project, on the Web site for the Institute for the Study of Civic Values. Internet: http://www.libertynet.org/~edcivic/sochome.html

Organizing for Neighborhood Development: A Handbook for Citizen Groups.
Internet: http://tenant.net/Organize/orgdev.html

Home Visiting: Building Bridges between a Family and Community[1]

Anne S. Robertson

volume 3, number 7

Tracy grabbed her two bags full of supplies and walked up the front steps of the duplex. The door flew open, and three grinning boys peered out at her. "Hey guys, good to see you!," she greeted them warmly. The boys pulled her into the house with a yell, "Mom, Tracy's here!" After giving the boy's mother a hug, Tracy sat at the kitchen table, and the boys watched as she pulled the week's activity out of her bags. Tracy is a Head Start home visitor who meets with families on a weekly basis, providing a valuable educational resource for needy children and parents in her community.

As a method for delivering services to needy or disenfranchised families, new attention is being given to home visiting programs such as the program sponsored by Head Start. Effective home visiting models have reported success with health issues, such as early intervention programs, and psychosocial issues, including child abuse and neglect. Tracy's parenting experience and early childhood training give her the knowledge to help this mother with the daily trials of parenting active preschoolers. In addition, Tracy is able to provide information on nutrition, health care, and learning activities that encourage school readiness. Through her consistent visiting, dedication, and willingness to accept the family "on their own turf," Tracy has built the trust and confidence of the family. In the same way that one might ask for advice from a trusted relative or friend, this parent feels comfortable sharing problems with Tracy and asking for help before a problem becomes overwhelming. However, effective home visiting is much more than just a weekly meeting with a new friend.

The winter 1993 issue of *The Future of Children*, published by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, analyzes the practice of home visiting and discusses principles and quality indicators that might guide future programs. Effective programs:

- *Addresses a broad spectrum of family needs.* Programs that are flexible and able to assist the family with multiple issues will have greater impact than those with a single focus.
- *Provides greater intensity and duration of services.* Families who received weekly visits and were linked to other services within the community were more successful than families who were visited monthly.
- *Uses professional staff as home visitors.* Programs where staff members were dedicated and well-trained, including people with bachelor's, master's, or nursing degrees, were more successful than programs using laypeople with little training as home visitors.
- *Sets realistic, individual goals for the family.* Home visitors who are sensitive to the unique characteristics of the clients are able to assist the family with developing achievable goals, and they see greater progress.

Another critical component to a successful home visiting program is supporting the concept that families have strengths, are resourceful, and can change when they are encouraged to do so. The interpersonal relationship that grows between the home visitor and the family or parent is a core factor that influences the family to build upon their strengths. The home visitor seeks to develop this relationship by modeling consistent, dependable

[1] Originally published as "Homevisiting: Bridging the Gap between a Family and the Community."

behavior and respecting confidentiality while setting limits on inappropriate actions. The home visitor also helps the family achieve their goals while promoting the parent's self-esteem.

In European countries such as Denmark and Great Britain, home visiting is often universal, and every family of a newborn will receive several home visits. However, in the United States, a home visitor is frequently paired with a family who is feeling the impact of multiple issues such as poverty, abuse or neglect, racism, handicap, or limited literacy. Home visiting programs cannot, nor should they be expected to, solve difficult social problems that affect all of society. Rather, the primary goal of the home visitor is to focus on the parent or caregiver and assist him or her in becoming more effective in parenting. The home visitor works with parents to find ways to solve problems that affect their family.

The pattern of home visiting will vary depending on program goals and will be tailored to family needs. The point of entry to the program may begin with a family referral by a health care or service provider, educator, neighbor, or friend. The family may or may not know about the referral, but the home visitor will meet with the family, explain the program, and obtain the parent's consent to participate, as well as provide clarification of the program's goals. Voluntary involvement is important since home visiting programs are more likely to be successful when participation is not mandatory.

Once the parent has expressed the desire to participate, regular home visits of 45 to 90 minutes will be scheduled. Some families may receive home visits for as long as three years. The first few visits center on goal setting for the family, intake or assessment information, and building trust between the visitor and parent. Later visits blend discussion of prepared educational activities with discussion of community resources that can assist the family with obtaining their goals. Quarterly evaluations are helpful for both the visitor and the family as they assess their progress and make changes as needed. During later stages, home visiting is gradually reduced as the family prepares to leave the program. A home visitor is successful when the family no longer needs the regular support provided through the program, and the parent has become more effective in his or her role.

Studies have suggested a number of long-term cost benefits of home visiting programs, including reduced need for expensive health care such as hospitalization and emergency room visits. Other benefits include reductions in government services, such as AFDC and food-stamp payments, and an increase in the capacity of the parent to become economically independent (*Home Visiting*, 1993, pp. 84-85). The evidence is compelling for states such as Massachusetts, where a broad collaborative of child and family advocates recently proposed The Newborn Home Visiting Bill. This bill will establish universal home visiting to all first-time parents under the age of 21 and will allow for visits to continue, for certain families, until the child is 3 years old. There is a broad-based, bipartisan support for the bill, since it is estimated that for every $3 spent on prevention, such as home visiting, the state saves approximately $6 on child welfare services, medical care, or other special services, as well as strengthens a parent's parenting skills, knowledge, and self-confidence.

Sources

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Home visiting [Special issue]. (1993). *The Future of Children, 3*(3).

For More Information

HIPPY USA
53 West 23rd St., 5th Floor
New York, NY 10010
Telephone: 212-645-4048

Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.
9274 Olive Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63132
Telephone: 314-432-4330

National Center on Family Literacy
Waterfront Plaza, Suite 200
325 West Main St.
Louisville, KY 40202-4251
Telephone: 502-584-1133

Even Start Programs
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20202-6132

Children's Trust Fund
Attn: Suzin Bartley and Shereen Tyrrell
294 Washington St., Suite 640
Boston, MA 02108
Telephone: 617-727-8957

Foster Parenting:
Reaching Out to Support Displaced Children

Anne S. Robertson

volume 3, number 9

Family foster care is designed to provide a supportive family environment for children who have been temporarily or permanently displaced from their biological family. Since the 1950s, foster care has been the preferred method of providing for needy children, replacing institutional alternatives such as orphanages. However, the current pool of foster families is shrinking (McKelvey & Stevens, 1994, p. 35), while the number of children in need of foster care is growing. According to records kept by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), 715,743 children needed out-of-home support during 1995. Information gathered by CWLA (Barbell, 1997, pp. 2-4) suggests that there are a number of reasons for the dramatic increase in the number of children in foster care. Those factors include:

- increases in the number of child abuse and neglect reports;
- increases in the rates of reentry into foster care;
- increased amount of time that children spend in care;
- decreased support from other systems such as mental health and juvenile justice systems; and
- increasingly complex and changing needs that may be manifested through emotional or behavioral problems, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS infection, and medical problems or physical handicaps.

With the growth in the population of foster children, as well as the increased level of expertise required for support, most states work throughout the year to find and train good foster families.

One family that is meeting this need, one child at a time, are the Calhouns. The Calhouns have been foster parents since 1989 and currently reside at HOPE Meadows, part of the HOPE for Children project. HOPE Meadows is located at a former Air Force base. The circle of houses, now filled with foster parents, children, foster grandparents, and counselors, is part of Hope Meadows, an exciting example of the "whole village" approach put into action to support needy children. We recently talked with Debbie Calhoun about her experiences as a foster parent. Debbie and her husband have 10 children, including 2 biological children, 5 adopted children, and 3 foster children. In 1989, they began foster parenting because they wanted to help kids. Debbie had a friend who was a foster parent, and with her friend's encouragement, the Calhouns investigated the possibilities.

A first step toward foster parenting, in most states, is to participate in a series of classes sponsored by the state Department of Children and Family Services. In the state where the Calhouns reside, the coursework takes about 9 weeks and covers rules and regulations that are pertinent to foster parenting as well as general parenting tips and health issues. The instructors are experienced parents, called "Master Foster Parents," and they try to provide a true-to-life picture of the rewards and difficulties associated with foster parenting. Debbie indicates that while the classes are helpful, the real training comes from being "on the job" when the foster family gets its first child. The classes are part of a total package of information that the state requires before the family can obtain a foster care license. Other requirements include an interview, a satisfactory physical examination, a

criminal check, and a home visit. This screening process may take six months or longer, providing everything goes smoothly. In the end, foster families that complete the application process will have a lot of information about appropriate parenting, resources that are available for the children, and a Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, which helps to clarify the role of the foster parent in the life of the foster child. Foster parents are provided with a monthly stipend for each child who is placed in the home. The amount varies, depending on the needs of the child.

It is important to note that foster parents do have choices about the children who may be placed in their home. The foster parents may also opt to work closely with the child's biological family. Some families feel that they work best with infants or young children, while others prefer the teen years. Prospective foster parents are given information about the child's history and may ask questions about the child's background if they have concerns. In the end, it is the prospective foster parent's choice whether or not a child will be placed in the home. By including the foster parents in decision-making, many state agencies are working to keep foster families as active participants in their child's placement team. Also, some states are increasing the number of children in "kinship-care" or are placing the child with a relative caregiver such as the grandparent, aunt, or older sibling (Feldman, 1997, p. 3). While there are advantages to this approach, the Children's Research Institute of California has raised concerns that children may be placed in a relative's home without a thorough assessment, and that the relative caregiver may not be provided with the same support services that are available to nonrelative foster families.

However, Debbie says that despite the lengthy application process and other procedures, placements don't always work. In fact, after her first year as a foster parent, she almost gave up. The two siblings who had been placed in her family simply needed more than Debbie and her husband could provide. The placement team decided to move the children to a residential treatment home that provided more intensive structure and support. The next child that the Calhouns fostered was a teen who needed a father and a family. This child did well and has since entered college on a scholarship. Seeing the success in their teenage foster son encouraged the Calhouns to take more foster children. Currently, the ages of their children range from 5 weeks to 22 years.

Other areas that concern those interested in foster parenting are the support and services that are available to the family. Debbie and other foster parents around the country concede that getting support through the state agencies can be difficult even though they may be entitled to this type of support. Agencies and social workers may be stretched in many different directions, and they depend on the foster parent to be the child's advocate in actively seeking the services the child may need. It is important that all families be connected to their community, but it is especially important for successful foster parenting. The Calhouns have lived in the same area for years, and now that they are residing at HOPE Meadows, Debbie feels they are getting all the services they need and getting them quickly. Those services include tutoring for the children, counseling, and the support of involved neighbors. The HOPE Meadows community is much like any other community since it includes parents, children, seniors, and volunteers who plan regular activities and potlucks. Since the members of HOPE Meadows have chosen to live there and understand the goals of the community, they are dedicated to supporting each other and the children.

Family styles vary in foster families, but one quality that is apparent in "Master" foster families is their dedication. Because of the problems that the children may bring to the family, foster parenting is not a 9 to 5 job. Debbie feels that the most important quality is that the family loves and cares for the child and is willing to sacrifice to provide the child with what is needed. This type of commitment may not be right for everyone, but people like the Calhouns feel that those daily rewards, seen in the little changes in the child, make the foster parent experience worthwhile.

Sources

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Feldman, Cassi. (1997, July/August). Staying with grandma: The old custom of caring for relatives' kids poses new challenges in the '90s. *Children's ADVOCATE,* pp. 3-4.

McKelvey, Carole A., & Stevens, JoEllen. (1994). *Adoption crisis: The truth behind foster care.* Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.

For More Information

Contact your state Department of Children and Family Services, or your state Ombudsperson.

Kinship Care Network
Edgewood Family Center
Telephone: 415-865-3000

HOPE for the Children and HOPE Meadows
Carolyn Costeel
Telephone: 217-893-4673

Robertson, Anne S. (1997, May). Displaced and unaccompanied children: Understanding this international problem. *Parent News* [Online], *3*(5). Available: http://npin.org/pnews/pnew597/pnew597b.html [1998, December 8].

Foster Parent Home Page
Internet: http://fostercare.org/FPHP

Grandparent Programs

Debbie A. Reese

volume 4, number 2

The Many Faces of Grandparenting

> "My daughter is not able to care for her children; I've been caring for them for several years now." "My son and his family live two blocks away, but I almost never see my grandchildren." "My son moved his family to another state to take a job, and I hardly ever see my grandchildren." "I am providing child care for my grandchildren so their parents can work."

Grandparents can feel overwhelmed or ignored, depending on the role they play in their grandchildren's lives. In today's society, an increasing number of grandparents find themselves responsible for raising their children's children. There are many reasons for this trend, including death of the parents, parental abandonment, drug-related prison terms, or mental illness.

According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau (1998), 4 million children (6% of all children) were living in their grandparents' homes in 1996. Of that number, 1.4 million did not have a parent also living in the home, which means that these children's grandparents were solely responsible for parenting their grandchildren.

When grandparents suddenly find themselves raising their grandchildren, many report feeling alone, bewildered, and unsure of how to begin. To meet the needs of grandparents raising their grandchildren, programs, organizations, and support groups have been developed and are available across the country. These organizations provide many resources, ranging from legal information to coping skills.

In 1993, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) opened the Grandparent Information Center to provide grandparent caregivers with information on resources and services and referrals to grandparent support groups. Grandparents and great-grandparents who contact the Center range in age from their 30s to their 70s (and older), with the most frequent age range being 50 to 60 years old. Half of all the grandparents who contacted the Center work, but many are on a fixed income (Woodworth, 1995).

In New York, grandparents can turn to Grandparents Reaching Out (GRO). Mildred Horn, founder and president of GRO, arranges for guest speakers and organizes social events. She is also planning a group therapy program for grandchildren. At social events, members of GRO are able to help each other through difficult problems based on their own experiences. GRO is also active in legislative issues related to grandparents.

Of course, not all grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Many do not live anywhere near their grandchildren and must work at maintaining a long-distance relationship. For the past 12 years, the Foundation for Grandparenting, based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, has been running Grandparent Grandchildren Summer Camp. Grandparent(s) and their grandchild (or grandchildren) spend a week together at a camp in New York engaging in activities such as hiking and boating. The camp founder, Dr. Arthur Kornhaber, brings grandparents together each day to discuss grandparenting issues, such as distance and divorce. Kornhaber finds that bringing the grandparent and grandchildren together in a natural, outdoor setting provides a powerful opportunity for them to get to know each other and form a lasting bond.

Many resources are available to help grandparents who are providing child care for their grandchildren. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and Ann Brown, Chairman of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, recently put together a brochure titled

"A Grandparents' Guide for Family Nurturing and Safety." The full text of the brochure can be viewed on the World Wide Web at: http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/grand/grand.htm. It includes many tips for grandparents, including:

- Establish a weekly time for the grandparent and grandchild to talk over the telephone. Parents can encourage the child to give the grandparent one "news" item to get them started.
- Arrange to do something special with each grandchild on an individual basis. Keep in mind each child's individual interests as you plan these events.
- Make your home child-safe for your grandchildren, keeping in mind the different ages of the children. A home that has been child-proofed for an infant may not be safe for a toddler.

Many additional resources for grandparents available on the Internet as well as in bookstores and libraries are listed below.

Books

de Toledo, Sylvie, & Brown, Deborah Edler. (1995). *Grandparents as parents: A survival guide for raising a second family.* New York: Guilford Publications. ISBN: 1-57230-020-5. ED 393 549.

Doucette-Dudman, Deborah, & LaCure, Jeffrey R. (1996). *Raising our children's children.* Minneapolis, MN: Fairview Press. ISBN: 0-925190-91-8. ED 397 994.

Takas, Marianne. (1995). *Grandparents raising grandchildren: A guide to finding help and hope.* New York: Brookdale Foundation. Available from: National Foster Parent Association, Inc., 9 Dartman Dr., Crystal Lake, IL 60014 ($3 for first copy, $1 each additional copy). ED 394 712.

Newsletters

AGAST Grandparent Information newsletter. AGAST is the Alliance of Grandparents Against SIDS Tragedy. To obtain a newsletter, call 800-793-SIDS and leave your name and address.

Grandparents Journal. Sample copy available for $2 by writing to Elinor Nuxoll, 1419 E. Marietta Ave., Spokane WA 99207-5026.

Grandparents Parenting... Again... Annual subscription is $5.00. Phoenix Foundation, 1500 W. El Camino, Suite 325, Sacramento, CA 95833. Telephone: 916-922-1615.

Your Grandchild. Bimonthly. To receive a sample copy, call 800-243-5201, or send email to sunielevin@aol.com

Online Publications

Are You Raising Your Grandchildren? by Marianne Takas.
http://www.fosterparents.com/index30raisinggrch.html

Grandparenting.
http://ohioline.ag.ohio-state.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5213.html

Grandparents as Parents: A Primer for Schools, by Dianne Rothenberg..
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1996/dr-gra96.html

A Grandparents' Guide for Family Nurturing and Safety, by T. Berry Brazelton and Ann Brown of the Consumer Product Safety Commission.
http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/grand/grand.htm

It's Not the Same the Second Time Around: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, by Renee S. Woodworth.
http://www.zerotothree.org/2nd_time.html

Respite Services to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, by Renee S. Woodworth and Holly Dabelko.
http://www.chtop.com/archfs45.htm

Secrets of Good Grandparenting, by Physicians of the Geisinger Health System.
http://www.geisinger.edu/ghs/pubtips/G/Grandparenting.htm

Things Grandparents, Neighbors and Concerned Citizens Can Do to Improve Education.
http://www.summit96.ibm.com/perspectives/citizenslist.html

Organizations

AARP Grandparent Information Center
601 E St., NW
Washington, DC 20049
Telephone: 202-434-2296
Fax: 202-434-6466

Alliance of Grandparents Against SIDS Tragedy
Telephone: 800-793-SIDS
Email: MURRAYEILE@aol.com

Caring Grandparents of America
400 Seventh St., NW, Suite 302
Washington, DC 20004-2206
Telephone: 202-783-0952

Foundations for Grandparenting
5 Casa del Oro Lane
Santa Fe, NM 87505
Email: gpfound@trail.com

Grandparents Reaching Out (GRO)
Mildred Horn
141 Glen Summer Rd.
Holbrook, NY 11741
Telephone: 516-472-9728

National Coalition of Grandparents, Inc.
137 Larkin St.
Madison, WI 53705
Telephone: 608-238-8751

Sources

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U.S. Census Bureau. (1998). *Facts for Grandparent's Day* [Online]. Available: http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/fs97-09.html [1998, December 8].

Woodworth, Renee S. (1995). You're not alone... You're one in a million. *Child Welfare, 75*(5), 619-635.

Of Interest. . .

Building Resilience:
Helping Your Child Cope with Frustrations at School

Lilian G. Katz

volume 2, number 11

Lilian G. Katz—parent of three, grandparent of five, internationally acclaimed child-development expert, and director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois—shares strategies that will help you help your child overcome occasional and, yes, inevitable, frustrations, fears, and disappointments at school.

When the Going Gets Tough...

Your children—like mine and all others—are bound to experience frustrations, distress, and setbacks from time to time in their school careers, such as stage fright at presentation time or disappointment over grades. But that doesn't have to mean that as parents we must launch a protest march down the road to the school. When my own children were small, I saw my job as helping them to cope with difficulties, rather than trying to make the school fit them.

I'm glad I decided to do that, because a growing body of literature on resilience and resistance to stress indicates that occasional frustrations can have positive results for kids in the long run. Children who experience no difficulties are as vulnerable later in life as are those who suffer from excessive stress. In other words, the normal ups and downs of life provide children with opportunities to develop immunities, just the way early experience with colds, earaches, and sore throats helps build the immune system.

In the case of unhappy experiences in school, you have an important role to play in helping your children develop coping strategies. Here are some dos and don'ts.

Do help your child overcome anxiety by putting a message in his or her "psychological pocket."

One of my sons came home from kindergarten one day early in the school year complaining that during circle time he "felt cold inside." I believed then, and still do, that I knew what he meant. I asked him gently, "What time do you have circle time?" As he couldn't read at the time, he didn't know. I asked him about the morning schedule and deduced that circle time was at about 10:30 A.M. I then said to him, "Tomorrow during circle time, look at the clock. I will look at the clock at around 10:30, too. Then remember that I'm thinking of you and sending good thoughts your way." When my son was 27 years old and I was teaching in India, he wrote me in a letter, "When I think of you, I feel you right next to me—just the way I did way back in kindergarten!" He never forgot this coping strategy.

Do remind your child of how he or she coped with bad moments in the past.

Does your child get scared or cranky at the prospect of tests, presentations, or new classroom routines? I remember when one of my sons was in first grade, I went to school to pick him up early to take him to the dentist. He already had had a few minor dental problems and, needless to say, was not eager to return for more work. He fussed quite a bit about leaving school. I then said to him, "Remember how nervous you were the last time you went to the

dentist?" "Yes," he said, almost tearfully. I continued, "Remember how uncomfortable it was in the dentist's chair?" He shuddered and said, "Yes." Then I added, "Remember how awful it was with all that stuff in your mouth while the dentist worked on your teeth?" By this time, he was clearly distressed and nodded his head in agreement.

Then I said, "Remember how relieved you were and how wonderful you felt when it was all over?" To which he responded with a bright, positive, "Yes." So I said, "It's going to be just like that all over again. You'll feel uncomfortable for a little while, and then it will be all over." Off we went for the unwelcome appointment.

This strategy illustrates several important points.

- It is important not to pretend that an experience will be painless. Be honest with children so that they can trust you.
- By joining with our children to face up to the distressing experience, we encourage them.
- When children learn to use their past experiences to cope with anticipated discomforts, they've gained a strategy they can use throughout life.

Do help your child focus on larger goals.

Almost every child will have a teacher or classmate at some point whom he or she does not like. When such cases arise, you can be most helpful by saying something like: "Sure, I can imagine how unpleasant that must be. But there is no way that every child can like every teacher all the time, the same way that no grown-up can like every person he or she has to work with. Part of life is learning how to keep working at what really matters even if you can't enjoy all those you work with. The important thing for you to keep in mind is what you can learn from your teacher. A teacher doesn't have to be your favorite person for you to learn from him or her."

Do model fairness, communication, and problem solving.

When your child reports feelings of frustration about an incident or procedure at school, listen thoughtfully and probe gently to get the facts. In this way, your child knows you care about his or her experience, but at the same time learns about how facts can get distorted under conditions of stress. For example, one of my sons reported with considerable indignation that during his creative writing class he asked the teacher if he could make a quick visit to the library. She replied that his class could only visit the library on Thursdays. "But I might not need the information on Thursday," he complained to me later. "I needed it today."

After offering a moderate dose of sympathy, I pointed out that if he had asked me if he could go to library, I would have said yes without hesitation. "But I know you," I added. I then explained that this teacher works with 150 youngsters per day and cannot know them all well. "How does she know you wouldn't wander off? And she is responsible for you! I'll bet she would really like nothing better than to have you make good use of the library!"

Don't criticize your child's teacher or school in front of your child.

Even young children can pick up on any worry, frustration, or disdain that you may feel. In the case of the youngest children, it is not unusual for them to attribute heroic qualities to their teachers, and overheard criticism may put a child in a bind over divided loyalties. In the case of older children, such criticism may foster rudeness or defiance to their teachers. Besides causing confusion, criticizing schools or teachers in front of children is not conducive to solving the underlying problem.

Don't take your child's word as gospel.

Getting the facts straight can be difficult for children as well as for adults. Whatever school concerns your child reports, listen carefully. Ask for details calmly and nonjudgmentally, and remember not to assume automatically that your child is in command of all the facts. If you simply accept your child's word and then react strongly, you may encourage him or her to exaggerate events.

Don't tell white lies like "Everything will be fine."

> As the story about my son and the dentist illustrates, it is best to discuss openly with your child that some moments in life can be upsetting—that life is like that—but they pass. If you avoid discussing the downsides of life and try to sweeten distasteful experiences with white lies, you will lose credibility in the eyes of your child, and at the same time miss an opportunity to help him or her build resilience.

From Dr. Katz:

"For more than 35 years, I have been involved in early childhood education. I started out as a participating mother with my own three children in a parent/cooperative nursery school, and after my kids went off to elementary school, I became a teacher at another parent co-op. Ever since then, I have been teaching, consulting with teachers of young children across the United States and in many other countries, and keeping current on the latest research on child development. All of this experience has provided opportunities for me to see schooling from the perspective of both a parent and a teacher."

Note: This article appeared in the October 1996 issue of Instructor *magazine, in "An Instructor Send-Home for Parents," as an Instructor Reproducible, with permission granted to duplicate and distribute to parents.*

Fostering School Success in Adolescents: Girls' Issues/Boys' Issues

Anne S. Robertson

volume 2, number 11

A visit to one of New York's newest experiments in education may surprise guests. The school, located in East Harlem, has only female students, dressed in neat uniforms of navy jackets, pleated skirts, and white blouses. The Young Women's Leadership School opened its doors this fall to 50 seventh-grade girls, approximately half of the original applicants. The school expects to expand through high school in future years if it can survive a complaint filed by the New York Civil Liberties Union and the National Organization for Women.

Both organizations assert that the school violates the 14th amendment, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and Title IX, all of which pertain to equal education in public schools.

In spite of the controversy surrounding this school, there has been growing interest in the concept of separate sex education during adolescence. The governor of California, Pete Wilson, has budgeted $5 million to fund approximately 20 single-sex schools. In addition, the legislature in California is planning to revise the wording in a Title IX amendment that restricts single-sex classrooms. Although few districts may take the plunge of allocating funds for a new school designed solely for one sex, a number of districts are reviewing options for single-sex classes in key academic areas such as math or science.

Separate boys' and girls' schools are not a new idea. The last "all-girls" public school in New York City began to admit boys in 1986 because it feared being sued for civil rights violations. Other schools, facing similar threats, had already changed similar exclusive policies. The current segregated programming reform is generated in part by recent research on the issues facing adolescent girls and boys in the school environment and their different approaches to learning in academics and with peers.

The data show that boys and girls start their middle school journey, around the ages of 10–14, on fairly equal footing. However, even in good schools and with sensitive teachers, some girls gradually lose ground in self-esteem and core academic areas—a phenomenon called "learned helplessness." Adolescent girls may feel less capable of responding in class or doing well in certain subjects. Some may adopt a compliant, ultra-feminine image in order to fit into perceived cultural expectations and social groups. In turn, their academic abilities may go unnoticed by teachers who are concentrating on more vocal, demanding students. Some girls may begin experiencing "learned helplessness" during their elementary school years.

Similarly, boys in the middle years may take on a more "macho" or masculine persona in order to cope with increasing violence and sexual pressure within the school environment and the greater society. Boys are more likely than girls to be removed from the classroom for disruptive behavior, to be suspended from school, and to fail to graduate. Special education referrals are higher for boys than girls by almost 4 to 1. Although some boys may be getting the teacher's attention, it is often for the wrong reasons. Academic failure also puts many middle-school boys at risk and becomes part of a vicious cycle—studies show that there is a positive correlation between academic failure and disruptive or violent activity. By their late teens and early twenties, males involved with illegal

drugs and related criminal activity outnumber females by almost 3 to 1.

The single-sex school movement represents a response to the frustrations of parents and educators of adolescent children. One mother, Mrs. Lopez, relates her daughter's experience with boys: "They are very aggressive. They would pull her hair and push her. Maybe if she was more extroverted then I wouldn't have to put her in a girls' school" (Henry, 1996, p. D1). One father reports his views of his daughter's all-girl school: "I'm relieved there is this opportunity to get this kind of education.... She is writing reams of stuff. She seems self-motivated" (Henry, 1996, p. D2). The idea of revamping the school to include boys frightens these parents. Instead, they suggest that someone could form an all-boys school. However, Michael Meyers of the New York Civil Rights Coalition calls the idea that boys are disruptive "despicable" and excluding them from a tax-supported school simply because they are boys, "prejudice" (Henry, 1996, p. D2). By contrast, in Britain, where single-sex schools are more common, parents of boys who opt for a boys' boarding school express concerns that a son needs to be separated from his mother in order to become a man.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW), a leading authority and advocacy organization on gender bias in schools, recognizes the unique problems faced by adolescent girls. However, when the issue of single-sex schools is discussed, AAUW takes a more balanced approach. In a new report titled "Girls in the Middle: Working to Succeed in School," they suggest reform that will improve education for boys and girls, including:

- Breaking schools into smaller units: Strengthen relationships between school staff and individual students so that students can have more personal attention.
- Bolstering school support to include adult mentors: Provide students with more positive adult connections.
- Providing professional development on gender sensitivity: Help teachers make classrooms more equitable and give equal attention to boys and girls.
- Conducting research on gender issues: Examine grades, test scores, and portfolios while looking at differences between boys and girls. Student focus groups can help professionals and parents understand the issues and suggest ways to change.
- Fostering leadership: Teach confrontational students mediation skills and encourage quiet students to participate in student government and other activities.

Using these and other techniques, including helping schools develop policies that make gender issues a priority, educators can improve the current system of co-education for all students.

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For More Information

Web site for American Association of University Women and "Girls in the Middle: Working to Succeed in School." Internet: http://www.aauw.org

Multicultural Parents and Families: How You Can Be Involved in Your Child's Education

Debbie A. Reese

volume 2, number 11

Increasingly, teachers are turning to parents to gather information about their children. This information is important to teachers who are trying to design a curriculum that is relevant to the home culture of children in the classroom.

What Do Teachers Learn about Dealing with Diversity in the Classroom?

Recently, Dr. Arlette Willis of the University of Illinois made the following statement to a group of pre-service teachers in an early childhood education course (personal communication, 1996). Dr. Willis was addressing the class about working with children of other cultures and how teachers may best enlist the help of parents. She commented to these students, who were learning to be teachers: "You ARE going to make mistakes. A much greater mistake would be to not try at all." The students in the course were only days away from beginning their field-based experience of student teaching.

These students, full of energy and enthusiasm for their chosen field, were about to enter classrooms that, in today's society, are increasingly composed of children from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Broadly stated, classrooms in the United States are becoming more visibly multicultural. Recognizing this trend, education colleges across the country are trying to provide their students with information that will help them reach out to parents as they develop curriculum that contains accurate, nonstereotypic information that promotes development of positive attitudes (Williams, 1991). Within schools, teachers attend workshops on multicultural education. Some principals (Davis, 1995) suggest teachers make home visits, seeking assistance from parents and giving credit to the parents when their ideas and suggestions are incorporated in the classroom.

Pre-service and in-service teachers learn that in Asian American and Native American cultures, eye contact is impolite (Leister, 1993), that Hispanic values include a strong emphasis on family loyalty (Griggs & Dunn, 1996), and that African Americans view things in their entirety rather than in isolated parts, and are people-oriented rather than object-oriented (Hale, 1983).

Along with this general information, pre-service and in-service teachers are also told that there is great variation within each cultural group, and that any single generalized statement may or may not apply to the children in his or her classroom. They learn that within these groups, there are many subgroups (e.g., the term Native American represents over 500 different tribes). Thus, many teachers want to incorporate elements of other cultures into their classrooms, but they are afraid of awkwardly stating a request to parents to assist in this endeavor. Many decide to ignore the opportunities for enriching the classroom by not asking at all; others decide not to ask in fear of offending the parent; and still others are willing to take the risk, knowing their students will reap the benefits of their courage.

How Can Parents Help?

As parents, we can reach out to those teachers as they work toward making their classrooms ones in which our children feel that their cultural or ethnic identity is valued and affirmed. We must remember that although we regard teachers as experts, they are still learning about diversity. We can help them

in that process, because the parent is an important and reliable resource for linguistic and cultural information (Edwards, Fear, & Gallego, 1995).

Your child's teacher may wish to learn about your home culture by asking your child to bring photographs of family members to class. Such photos can be the basis for a variation of the show-and-tell activity, in which your child describes the people in the photograph using the same words and phrases you use within your home. For example, many African Americans use the term "nappy" to describe hair, and Latino/a families often turn to a curandera (folk healer) as well as a Western physician during illness (Leister, 1993). Photos can also convey information about family structures other than the nuclear family, such as extended families common among Native Americans. Across cultures, we capture special moments that we celebrate with photographs. These photographs can convey a wealth of information about birth rituals, rites of passage, or traditional wedding practices.

You can serve as a resource to the teacher as a classroom guest. Artifacts, books, music, or even home videos you have at home that are specific to your home culture can be taken into the classroom and used as learning tools. Swick, Boutte, and Van Scoy (1994) suggest that families create a book with photos, drawings, and writings prepared by family members. Such a book could also be taken into the classroom and used as a learning tool. With your child by your side and as a partner in leading this activity, discuss these items in the context of their use within your home. This activity will work toward breaking down common stereotypes and misconceptions about items that have become associated with specific cultures. You can lead cooking activities, telling the children about the reasons why this particular food is special to your family or culture.

Teachers are encouraged to make classroom readers (similar to basal reading texts) that use children's own words and phrases. The teacher may ask a parent for assistance in preparing such a text (Grant, 1995).

These activities should be followed up with a period in which children can ask questions to clarify their thinking or to gain further information. Some questions may reflect the misconceptions children have learned, and you should be prepared to receive and answer the questions in an honest yet sensitive manner that imparts accurate information.

Parent–teacher conferences offer another opportunity for parents to help teachers deal with diversity in the classroom. During parent–teacher conferences, provide the teacher with information about specific cultural practices in which your child will participate, especially if participation requires an absence from school. The teacher may have a prepared list of questions to ask you about various aspects of family life such as sleep patterns, bedtime routines, toilet training, holidays, or special family events (York, 1991). The teacher may ask you to review a book about your home culture that he or she may want to use with the children. Or she may ask you about the authenticity and appropriateness of artifacts he or she has collected for use in the classroom. The teacher may ask you to help her develop a lesson on some aspect of your home culture. If you are comfortable with the request, offer your honest feedback.

If your child comes home with materials or information that, from your perspective, are inappropriate or contain factual errors, contact the teacher and discuss specifically what you deem inappropriate. If you can, suggest alternative activities or materials that more accurately represent your culture.

How Important Is It for Parents to be Involved?

Recent research indicates that family involvement in your child's education enhances your child's achievement and fosters positive attitudes—resulting in higher graduation rates and higher enrollment rates in post-secondary education (Henderson, 1995). Research also indicates that students learn best when the classroom curriculum reflects the history and culture of the students (Hudley & Barnes, 1993). Your child and others in this and future classrooms will benefit from a teacher/parent partnership that has involved fruitful discussion and interaction on multiculturalism in the classroom.

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Directory of Hotlines and Online Services for Parents

Dawn Ramsburg

volume 3, number 5

Have you ever wondered who you could call in times of a parenting crisis? Or has your child ever needed help with homework that you could not provide? If so, the following list of hotlines and online services may be a useful resource for you. There are many organizations that can provide assistance for parents on topics that range from feeling frustrated by an out-of-control child to wanting help with your child's homework. Although many of these hotlines are free of charge and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week nationwide, please note that others are only available in certain areas, at certain times, or for a fee.

Nationwide Parenting Hotlines

Boy's Town National Hotline

Provides crisis intervention, information, and referrals for children and families. Spanish-speaking counselors and access to translation services for 100 other languages are also available.
800-448-3000 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)
800-448-1833 (TTY)

Child Abuse Hotline

Provides services to children and adults involved with child abuse.
800-422-4453 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

Child Care Aware Toll-Free Parent Information Line

A service for parents across the United States who need child care.
800-424-2246

Child Find Hotline

Helps parents locate children and helps lost children who need assistance.
800-I-AM-LOST (9am-5pm EST, Monday to Friday)

Child Help USA Hotline

Provides crisis counseling as well as general information on child abuse and related issues.
800-422-4453 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

Down Syndrome Hotline

Provides information and referral services to new parents; information on education, support groups, and medical research; a newsletter; and information on conferences.
800-221-4602 (9am-5pm EST, Monday to Friday)

Kid Save

Provides information and referrals to public and private services for children and adolescents in crisis.
800-543-7283 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

National AIDS Hotline

Answers basic questions about AIDS/HIV (prevention, transmission, testing, health care).
800-342-AIDS (24 hours a day/7 days a week)
Spanish: 800-344-7432 (8am-2am EST)
TTY: 800-AID-7889 (10am-10pm EST, Monday-Friday).
Teens: 800-234-TEEN

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Provides assistance to parents and law enforcement officials who seek help with a missing or exploited child case, who want prevention information on how to safeguard children, and who

need help with reunification once the child is found.
800-THE-LOST (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

National Immunization Information Hotline
Provides referrals and information on shots infants need.
800-232-2522 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

National Parent Information Network
Responds to requests from parents and professionals who work with parents regarding parenting and education-related issues from birth to early adolescence.
800-583-4135
Email: askeric@askeric.org

NineLine
Helps parents with problems with their children and provides referrals for youth or parents regarding drugs, homelessness, and runaways. If all counselors are busy, stay on the line and one will be with you as soon as possible.
800-999-9999 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

Teen Help
Provides a national toll-free hotline designed to assist parents, child care professionals, and others in locating appropriate resources for the treatment of struggling adolescents.
800-637-0701

Parenting Hotlines for Specific Areas

Baby Your Baby Hotline (Utah only)
A toll-free resource for all pregnant women and their families in Utah. Provides assistance with prenatal care, finding child care, information on immunizations, or where to find parenting support groups.
800-826-9662 (7:30am-5:30pm, Monday to Friday)

Families with a Future Hotline (Illinois only)
For parents in Illinois who need help with prenatal and newborn care. Services also available in Spanish.
800-545-2200

Parent Information and Referral Center (Colorado only)
Designed for anyone taking care of kids (parents, grandparents, daycare providers, etc.) who have questions.
800-690-2282

Parent Line (North Dakota only)
Provides information and assistance to parents in North Dakota.
800-258-0808
231-7923 in Fargo

Parents Anonymous (See local listings)
There are over 1,200 organizations nationwide—most with some type of crisis service. Check your local phone listings for the number in your area.

Parents Anonymous of Arizona provides a 24-hour hotline for Arizona residents only.
800-352-0528

Commercial Parenting Hotlines

American Baby Helpline
Provides advice on a variety of baby-related topics, such as discipline or feeding. Calls cost $.95 per minute.
900-860-4888 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

Parenting Tips Hotline
For helpful tips on: Baby before Birth, Toddler Training, Pre-Teens & Teens. Plus tips on: Breast Feeding, Bedtime, Tantrums, Schools, and Talking about Sex. Calls cost $2.00 per minute.
900-988-0187, ext. 224

Homework Hotlines

Dial-A-Teacher
Free service run by the New York City teachers' union and the United Federation of Teachers. Can provide answers in French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Arabic, Hebrew, and Creole. Closed on school holidays.
212-777-3380 (4-7pm EST, Monday to Thursday)

Homework Hotline
Provides advice to help your child succeed in spelling, math, vocabulary, reading, and learning how to learn. Calls cost $2.75 a minute.
900-443-3233, ext. 500 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)

Parenting Help Online

Parents AskERIC
An electronic mail question-and-answer service for parents and those who work with parents on issues related to child development, care, and education.
Email: askeric@askeric.org

Homework Help Online

Dr. Math
Provides assistance with math as well as other homework problems. Operated by the Math Forum of Swarthmore College and financed by the National Science Foundation.
Internet: http://forum.swarthmore.edu/dr.math

Family Education Network
Provides general information on a variety of topics.
Internet: http://familyeducation.com/home

Homework Help
Click on one of the links on the main Homework Help page and you'll go to a general discussion on that academic subject. Once you are in one of the areas, you're free to browse the questions and responses or to post a question of your own. Teachers from several school districts in the Twin Cities area (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN) monitor the discussions and will post responses to your questions. They may point you to someplace on the Internet where you can find the answer on your own, or may provide the answer and then point you to places where you can find out even more.
Internet:
http://www.startribune.com/stonline/html/special/homework

KidsConnect
Provides answers within 48 hours to questions sent via electronic mail. Staffed with volunteer online librarians. Run by the American Association of School Librarians.
Internet:
http://www.ala.org/ICONN/kidsconn.html

Monroe County Public Library (Bloomington, IN)
Provides an electronic mail question-and-answer service.
Internet: askus@monroe.lib.in.us

Living in a Stepfamily: Neither Cinderella nor the Brady Bunch

Dawn Ramsburg

volume 3, number 8

In 1995, 40% of all marriages in the United States were remarriages for at least one of the partners, with approximately 65% of remarriages involving children from a prior marriage.

Despite the prevalence of remarriages in America, fictional examples like "Cinderella" or the "Brady Bunch" may keep many stepfamilies from developing realistic expectations of what stepfamily life will be like. For example, single parents may think that remarriage will be the solution to some of their problems because they will have someone to share the parenting load and help maintain the household. Or children may feel angry that they have to share their biological parent with a new spouse or even new step-siblings. Or many stepfamilies believe that their new family will be "just like everyone else's." It is important, however, for family members to learn that stepfamily life is not worse than, better than, or a substitute for other families; it is simply different (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995a).

There are several factors that make stepfamilies different. One of the main factors is that stepfamilies involve more people in more complex relationships. The complexity of stepfamily life can lead to several problems for both children and parents that should be addressed to contribute to the success of the remarriage.

These problems include:

- *Feelings of loss.* For adults and children, feelings of insecurity, sadness, and anger can all result from the loss of the biological family or the loss of the dream of the perfect marriage/family (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995a). For children, these feelings of loss can also lead to feelings of guilt and anger because they may feel they were responsible for the breakup of the first marriage. Or they may feel angry because they had no input over the decisions that were made (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995b).
- *Divided loyalties.* Children in stepfamilies often feel torn in their loyalty between their biological parent and the stepparent. Parents, too, will feel torn between their loyalty to their children and their desire for the new spouse to feel like a "real" parent (Molgaard, 1993).
- *Belonging to two households.* Even if children only visit their noncustodial parent, they still belong to two households, with different rules, activities, and values (Molgaard, 1993). Children may have difficulty adjusting immediately to a new set of ideas and rules (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995b).
- *Unrealistic expectations.* When stepfamily life is not what members expected, feelings of inadequacy, discouragement, anger, and disappointment can emerge (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995a).
- *Building relationships.* Parents might want stepchildren to quickly feel love, trust, and respect, but these feelings often take years to develop, usually about 3 to 5 years (Molgaard, 1993; Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995a). Feelings of fear can make this process even longer, however, if children are afraid that all relationships will end in failure (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995b).

- *Legal relationships.* Unless the stepparent adopts, the legal relationship within stepfamilies exists only between husband and wife, not between stepparent and stepchildren. This can create problems in terms of right to inheritance, school records, and medical attention (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995a).
- *Discipline by the stepparent.* Although a stepparent may want to help their spouse by taking over some of the discipline responsibilities, children often will resent stepparent discipline, thinking "You can't tell me what to do because you're not my real parent."

Coping Strategies

To minimize the stress that these problems can create, there are several coping strategies the stepfamily can try.

- Plan activities involving different subgroups of the stepfamily to help relationships grow (Pitzer, 1990).
- Keep up with your support system (co-workers, friends, extended family). Again, this will help relationships build. It may also be useful to seek group support (through church or community organizations) from others who have had similar experiences (Molgaard, 1993).
- Give children as many choices as possible to help them regain a sense of control for different aspects of their lives. Including children in discussions about new rules and family activities will also help eliminate their feelings of helplessness (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995a).
- Continue to reassure children that having a warm relationship with a stepparent will not endanger the relationship with the biological parent (Seymour, Francis, & Steffens, 1995a).

For discipline issues:

- Let the biological parent handle most discipline during the first few months and maybe even years for older children, since children accept guidance and discipline more easily from those they trust (Molgaard, 1993). This will allow the stepparent to focus on building a strong relationship.
- Discuss rules and consequences as a couple (Molgaard, 1993). Talk about behavior problems and expectations with your new spouse. This allows the stepparent to be involved in discipline even though the biological parent is dealing directly with the child.
- Leave the stepparent in charge when the biological parent is gone, making sure to tell the children (Molgaard, 1993). This helps children understand that the stepparent carries out the rules that both parents have agreed upon.

Building a healthy stepfamily takes time, just as it does for any family. To help strong relationships grow within the stepfamily, it is important to be patient and acknowledge everyone's feelings. As the family members learn what to expect from one another and what their strengths are, they can make stepfamily life work for them.

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For More Information

Internet

Contact your local Cooperative Extension for more information on stepfamilies. Most Extension offices will have or can direct you to programs that deal with stepfamily issues. For example, the Kansas State Research and Extension Program has developed the program, Stepping Stones for Stepfamilies. [Editorial Note: As of 4/2/98, this page is no longer being maintained.]

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Organizations

Stepfamily Association of America, Inc.
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 212
Lincoln, NE 68508
Telephone: 402-477-7837

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"Equity and Young Children as Learners": Highlights of Barbara Bowman's Speech at the Families, Technology, and Education Conference

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Last month at the Families, Technology, and Education Conference, Barbara Bowman, a noted authority in early childhood education and the president of the Erikson Institute in Chicago, spoke about issues of equity and computer use by young children. Bowman expressed delight that parents seem to recognize the importance of technology. Her remarks that have particular relevance to parents will be discussed in this article.

Citing a study that indicates that half of the nation's 17-year-olds are not adequately prepared for jobs that require technological skills, Bowman suggested that we are not currently teaching young children how to use technology creatively and competently. Although we once thought that computers would interfere with the opportunities young children have to play with blocks or experiment with finger paint, we now recognize our responsibility to teach children to use technology so that they will be prepared to participate in the technological world of the 21st century.

Given the explosion in the number of software programs available today, Bowman sees them along a continuum from programs that are very open-ended and active and require that the child direct the computer, to those that are very closed and passive and require that the child simply provide the correct answer to a question posed by the program.

Parents are most familiar with the closed-end programs that are essentially electronic worksheets designed for the drill and practice of basic reading and math skills. Two examples are the "Reader Rabbit" and "Math Rabbit" programs published by the Learning Company. These programs provide the child with a series of questions to be answered. Although such programs add a measure of entertainment to drill and practice, they do not give the child an opportunity to use the computer as a tool to reflect his or her thinking.

Next on the continuum are the programs that offer a mixture of closed- and open-ended learning opportunities. Parents are also familiar with these programs. They take the form of storyboards, simulations, and games. Examples of this type are the programs published by EduQuest. In the underwater and rainforest programs, the child is actively involved in selecting pictures of plants, animals, and insects to use in the story he or she writes. The child has more control of what happens than he or she does in electronic worksheet programs, but the options from which the child may choose are predetermined by the person who wrote the program, and there are limits as to what the child may do with his or her choice.

The third area on the continuum is dominated by programs that provide information requested by the user. Examples of these programs are encyclopedias and dictionaries on CD-ROM and the Internet. The content is set by someone else, but the child interacts by locating the information he or she wants and using it as he or she wishes.

At the most open end of the continuum are programs that give the child control of the tool, telling the computer what to do to reflect the child's thinking. Examples of this sort of program are word processors, calculators, and graphics programs. To use these programs, the child must

have a vision and use his or her knowledge about the program to reflect that vision.

Although much software is valuable, Bowman suggests we need to shift to the open end of the continuum. We must help children actively use the computer as a tool to communicate their own thinking. In this way, the child is most cognitively active, and this active use is what is needed for the 21st century.

Unfortunately, children from low-income and minority homes have less access to computers in their homes and schools than their middle- or upper-class peers who are part of the dominant society.

Bowman identified five recommendations that we must think about with respect to young children and technology:

- People control technology. A child should learn that computers are controlled by a person, and that he or she could be that person. Children should begin to see themselves as individuals who control the technology.
- Technology is not just computers; it takes many forms. Calculators, telephones, tape recorders—these are all technologies that perform specific tasks and operate in specific ways. Children can appreciate the differences in these forms.
- Technology has rules that govern how it works. The various forms all have a power source. They all have a set of procedural instructions that tell us how to use them.
- Technology has languages. While interacting with computers, children learn a specific vocabulary and way of speaking: "Load the disc" or "Turn on the modem." Children master this way of speaking quite easily.
- Computer programs vary from the preprogrammed ones that require children to employ a narrow set of skills to those that permit a more complex, broad range of possible outcomes.

In her closing comments, Bowman stressed the importance of providing all children with opportunities to use open-ended programs and that our children must become individuals who are active users of technology (rather than reactors to it). Children must learn that technical skills are socially desirable and expected of all of us.

Barbara Bowman is one of three faculty members who founded the Erikson Institute in Chicago, Illinois, in 1966. She is an authority on early education and a nationally recognized advocate for improved and expanded training for practitioners who work with children and families.

Mrs. Bowman, a past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), combines advocacy at the national level with a strong commitment to leadership and teaching. At Erikson she teaches courses in early education and administration. She has also taught at universities in China and Iran. In addition, she has directed training projects for Head Start teachers, caregivers of infants at risk for morbidity or mortality, and preschool primary teachers and administrators. Her research has most recently focused on the public schools, specifically, introducing developmentally appropriate practices and authentic assessment in the early grades. She is a frequent consultant on parent support programs.

Proceedings of the Families, Technology, and Education Conference *(edited by Anne S. Robertson) are available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Children's Research Center, 51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, IL 61820-7469. Telephone: 217-333-1386; 800-583-4135 (toll-free). Fax: 217-333-3767. Email: ericeece@uiuc.edu.*

ADD/ADHD: What Does It Mean for the Family?[1]

Anne S. Robertson

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We receive many questions every month about attention deficit disorders through our Parents AskERIC service. The following article was prepared in response to some of those frequently asked questions.

What Is ADD/ADHD?

Some specialists estimate that anywhere from 3–10% of school-age children are affected by attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992; Rief, 1993). Behavioral characteristics of attention deficit disorder include: being easily distracted, difficulty listening and following directions, difficulty focusing and sustaining attention, difficulty concentrating and staying on task, inconsistent performance in school (some say the one common aspect of ADD/ADHD children is that they are "consistently inconsistent"), being tuned out or "spacey," being disorganized or having poor study skills, and difficulty working independently (Rief, 1993). Children with ADHD may have characteristics similar to a child with ADD, but ADHD children may also demonstrate impulsive behaviors, a high activity level, difficulty with transitions, being easily overstimulated or aggressive, social immaturity, a high frustration level, and low self-esteem (Rief, 1993).

All children may have some of these behaviors, at an age-appropriate level, or during a transitional phase, such as after the birth of a new baby in the family. However, the ADD/ADHD child will show a pattern, over a period of years, of having a number of these characteristics at levels that are not situation- or age-appropriate.

The scientific study of the ADD/ADHD condition has been extensive, although the name has changed over the past few decades. In the past, children who have had signs of this condition have been labeled as fidgety, minimally brain damaged, hyperkinetic, or having minimal brain dysfunction (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992). The American Psychiatric Association outlines the criteria for defining ADD/ADHD, including the presence of at least 8 of 14 behavior characteristics (Wodrich, 1994).

The diagnosis of ADD/ADHD should not be made quickly. It should include information from a variety of significant adults in the child's life including the parents, teachers, physician, and psychologist who specializes in the field, as well as input from the child. It may also be helpful to have a learning specialist involved because ADD/ADHD children frequently have special education needs such as giftedness or difficulty in math. As research continues, some specialists are encouraging people to think of ADD/ADHD not as a disorder, but simply as a different style of learning which, when supported, can enhance the student's innate abilities.

It is not unusual for ADD/ADHD children with high intellectual abilities to go undiagnosed until middle school or junior high because they have learned how to compensate enough to "get by" in elementary school (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992). When a student is diagnosed later in life, research shows that elementary teachers' reports had often attributed these students' inattention and inconsistencies to boredom, laziness, or behavior

[1] Originally published as "ADD/ADHD: What Does It Mean for Parents and Families when Their Child Is Diagnosed with This Condition?"

problems. However, the increased demands of secondary school make it difficult for even the brightest student to keep up both academically and socially. An accurate evaluation with appropriate support becomes essential for these students to help them fulfill their potential and increase their self-esteem, which may have already been damaged by behavior problems or poor social relationships.

Could I Have Prevented ADD/ADHD in My Child?

When parents have a child with any type of problem, it is not unusual for the parents to feel guilty or blame themselves. Parenting education and support have been shown to be very helpful for families with an ADD/ADHD child, and their value cannot be overemphasized (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992; Rief, 1993). However, as scientists and medical professionals learn more about the possible causes of this condition, there is growing evidence that parents likely had little control over the cause of ADD/ADHD (Rief, 1993; Wodrich, 1994; Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992). The following are commonly accepted as the most likely causes:

- Heredity/genetic predisposition: Another member of the family—for example a grandparent, uncle, or aunt—had a similar temperament or pattern of behavior.
- Biological/physiological causes: Possible chemical imbalance that inhibits the efficiency of the neurotransmitters of certain portions of the brain.
- Lead poisoning: Ingesting toxic levels of lead, either by mouth or absorption.
- Allergic/medical conditions: Predisposition toward asthma, food allergies, and ear infections.
- Pregnancy/birth complications: Premature birth, lack of oxygen, or history of prenatal exposure to drugs/alcohol.
- Brain injury: Present in a very small number of ADD/ADHD children.

As researchers continue to look at the causes of ADD/ADHD, advances will likely be made so that the diagnosis will not be confused with other unrelated conditions.

Will It Go Away?

It was previously thought that the majority of children outgrew many characteristics of ADD/ADHD by adolescence. Many parents and teachers felt that if they could just get their child through the elementary school years, then ADD/ADHD issues would diminish. It is now clear that as many as 75% of ADD/ADHD youngsters will continue to have problems related to attention deficit throughout their adolescence and into adulthood (Wodrich, 1994). Although the adolescent may not be as conspicuously hyperactive as a younger child, he will likely still struggle, in excess of the normal teenage experience, with impulsiveness and inconsistency, which will affect school, family, and peer relationships. This behavior may become particularly problematic during unsupervised times with peers, and during a stage when parents, teachers, and society in general have increased expectations of adult-like behaviors.

As many as 65% of children who struggle with hyperactivity will still have some ADHD characteristics as adults, and a much smaller number, 25%, will continue to have significant difficulty related to ADD/ADHD during adulthood (Wodrich, 1994; Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992).

What Can Be Done Now?

Some of the information and statistics about hyperactivity can be worrisome. It is important for parents to remember that the majority of adults with ADD/ADHD are successful, contributing members of society. But it also clear that there are several nonmedical factors that can affect that outcome. These factors include early diagnosis and treatment, intelligence, family status, friends, activity level, ability to delay rewards, aggression, and parenting style (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992).

Once an assessment has determined that a child has ADD/ADHD, it is important that a comprehensive plan of treatment be developed. Effective management at school, within the family, and within peer relationships is important. Most experts recommend a three-step plan that involves the school environment, home environment, and medical support.

Parents can meet with the teacher and the district's special education coordinator to request an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for their

child that will address the child's need for academic or behavioral support. Parenting education and support are critical components to consistent management. Key elements of parental support include understanding, distinguishing between noncompliance and incompetence, giving positive directions, and fostering success (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992). Although some ADD/ADHD children do not need medication to help with managing their condition, many others do during some stage in their lives. Parents need to investigate the alternatives available for their child and when medication would be helpful.

Drs. Sam and Michael Goldstein suggest the following ways of encouraging success for your hyperactive child (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1992):

- Educate yourselves.
- Exercise effective management strategies at home.
- Foster parental unity.
- Develop positive parent–child relationships.
- Maintain family stability.
- Cultivate good friends.
- Get and use problem-solving training.
- Work toward school success.
- Do not ignore nonhyperactive problems.
- Seek appropriate medical treatment.

Occasionally reviewing these areas and maintaining consistent progress for your ADD/ADHD child in all categories will help with management.

How Will This Condition Affect Our Family and Our Other Children?

The impact that the ADD/ADHD child may have on the family will vary greatly depending on the extent that the child is affected, the family culture, and other siblings. If the family culture and the parents place a high value on activities and athletic prowess, then it is likely that a very active child will be admired and given appropriate outlets for physical activity. The same may be true of an intensely emotional child in a family that values dramatics and the arts. However, it may be very difficult for a highly active or intense child if the family culture is more sedate or less vocal. In a situation where the child's behavior is significantly different than family expectations, it is easy for the ADD/ADHD child to become the family "scapegoat" when problems arise. Understanding how the family culture can change to positively impact the child's temperament is an important goal of parenting education.

Also, any parent with more than one child knows that children within the same family can have vastly different personalities. Under the illusion of "fairness," parents often feel that siblings should be treated identically, have the same rules, and aspire to similar expectations. There is evidence to suggest that parents shouldn't be quite as concerned about equal treatment because children do understand, and think it is all right, when parents treat them differently (Kowal, 1997). Learning to understand and respect the different strengths in your children, and encouraging their individual development, will likely help the siblings respect and accept each other.

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For More Information

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Moving? Choosing a School? Sources of Information on Individual Schools and School Districts

ERIC/EECE Information Services Staff

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It's that time of year again! It's the time of year when parents begin to think about the next school year and choosing the best school for their child.

Whether your child will be in kindergarten and you are confronting this decision for the first time, or whether you live in a school district that offers a number of schools—public or private—from which you can pick, or whether you are moving to another part of the country and trying to determine the school district and neighborhood in which to buy a house, the decision is a difficult one and should depend on information about the school itself, as well as comparative standardized test scores.

School quality depends on many factors, not all easily measurable, and not all equally important for each individual child or family. Based on knowledge of their own child, parents may want to consider what is most important to their particular situation: Small class size? A culturally diverse student and teacher population? The availability of extracurricular activities like band or orchestra? Second language opportunities in Japanese or Latin? A particular teaching approach, like mixed-age grouping or Montessori? High test scores?

Parents who are interested in how schools in a particular school district compare can call the district office and get a copy of the individual "school report cards" for each school, which provide standardized test scores at different class levels. If more than one district is under consideration, several districts in the same geographical area can supply this information for comparative purposes. Since schools vary widely at the individual building level and at the individual classroom level, these comparisons can supply one kind of comparative information for schools.

Realtors often have good information about the reputation of particular schools in a geographic area. They can be a good resource when making decisions as to which neighborhood or area of a city might be the best choice, based on what the family is looking for in a school.

Parents may want to keep in mind that no written set of assessments or test scores can take the place of visiting a school and forming one's own opinion about the overall environment and quality of the school.

According to the National Principal Hotline (March 1996) hosted each year by the National Association for Elementary School Principals during their annual conference, these are some things to think about in choosing a new school:

- Check out the school district's annual report to determine the expenditure per pupil. In many communities, this dollar amount will be closely linked to school quality.
- Visit the school to see if you get the feeling that it is child- and family-oriented.
- Check to see what services are available at the school. Look for guidance counselors, an on-site nurse, a librarian, and a secretary, and check to see if they work at more than one school. If any of these key personnel do work at more than one school, be cautious!
- Check the structure of the school year. Do you want your child in a year-round school or do you prefer a more traditional school year?
- Check to see what percentage of the students go on to college if you are looking at a high school.

- Check the local library for books and videos on moving to a new school. Look for books for children as well as adults.

Several publications and fee-based services also provide information comparing schools, usually by standardized test scores.

Publications

Bainbridge, William, L., & Sundre, Steven M. (1990). *School match guide to public schools.* New York: ARCO. ISBN: 1037808593.

Gale Research, Inc. (1995). *Educational rankings annual 1995.*

Lists best elementary and secondary schools for each state. Also compares best schools across states. Criteria for ranking schools given in the publication.

Harrison, Charles. (1991). *Public schools USA: A comparative guide to school districts.* Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides. ISBN: 1560790814.

This guide is excellent but has not been updated since 1991.

Koetzsch, Ronald E. (1997). *Parents' guide to alternatives in education.* Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications. ISBN: 1570620679. ED 411 992.

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Quality counts—A report card on the condition of public education in the 50 states. A supplement to *Education Week,* January 8, 1998, Vol. XVII.

Uses data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress for its comparisons. A portion of the data from *Quality Counts* is available on the Internet. You can take a look at school report cards from any of the 50 states. Connect to *Education Week*'s Web site at:

http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc98/98home.htm

You can purchase a copy of this report through an online ordering system or by calling 800-436-1834.

Unger, Harlow G. (1993). *How to pick a perfect private school.* New York: Facts on File. ISBN: 0816028877. ED 401 027.

Services and Organizations

Council for American Private Education (CAPE)
1726 M. St. NW, Suite 703
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: 202-659-0016
Email: cape@connectinc.com

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Although NCES does not collect statistics to evaluate or compare schools and school districts, some states do collect such statistics. John Ralph may be able to provide names of persons to contact in individual states.

Contact: John Ralph (202-219-2270)

Quality Education Data (QED) (private company)
Denver, CO
Telephone: 800-525-5811

State-by-State School Guides that include demographic descriptions of schools in each state are published by QED based on an annual survey. The Guides list all public, private, and parochial schools in each state; provide listings of names and addresses of school district and school building administrators; and list the numbers of computers and predominant brands of computers used in the schools. Primarily intended for those who are marketing to school districts, QED offers mailing lists. (THIS IS A FEE-BASED SERVICE.)

School Match (private company)
5027 Pine Creek Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
Telephone: 800-992-5323

Provides comparative information on specific schools in the United States. (THIS IS A FEE-BASED SERVICE.)

Internet: http://schoolmatch.com

This is the new Web address for SchoolMatch, the national school research/consulting organization and database provider. The new offering for parents, educators, realtors, attorneys, corporate executives, and others interested in school information includes:

- A helpful glossary of education-related terms

- National statistics about elementary and secondary education
- A state-by state breakdown of how states organize educational resources
- News Briefs about educational policy changes
- Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about school data

The SchoolMatch Web site allows the user to scan and choose from a variety of additional data and consulting services, such as comparing schooling alternatives, helping solve school-related problems, assessing the school issue in child custody cases, and evaluating quality of life factors in corporate site selection.

State Departments of Education

Many State Departments of Education provide detailed assessment testing data for the school districts/counties in their state (e.g., Colorado, Oregon) through the Internet. You can link to all the State Departments of Education at:

http://ericeece.org/statlink.html

Other Internet Sites

American School Directory (lets you search for information on 106,000 K-12 schools in the United States)
http://www.asd.com

Choosing the Right School—A Family Guide (National Association of Independent Schools)
http://www.schools.com/nais/pub/choosing/right-school.html

Petersons Education Center
http://www.petersons.com

School Directory Web site (provides links to school Web pages)
http://esinet.com/schooldirectory/AMERICA.HTM

School District Data Book Profiles

Searchable Web site that provides demographic data for school districts across the country.

http://govinfo.kerr.orst.edu/sddb-stateis.html

Boarding Schools Online
http://www.schools.com

Children and Sports: Don't Forget to Practice Sportsmanship!

Dawn Ramsburg

volume 4, number 6

As the weather grows warmer, memories of spending hours in my backyard with my parents and my sisters come flooding back. The game of choice for us was softball, although there were many games of kick soccer, croquet, badminton, tag, hopscotch, and catch, as well. From the time we finished cleaning up after dinner until it was too dark to see the ball anymore, we took turns hitting, pitching, and fielding the softball. And over the course of several years, starting when I was 8 years old, our dad took turns coaching each of us on a local park district team until my youngest sister finished playing.

Through those hours of playing in the backyard, my sisters and I learned a variety of skills—how to throw a ball, how to hit, and how to catch. By having our dad as a coach, we also learned another important part of the game—how to be a good sport. Sitting around the kitchen table after a game, we learned about other aspects of the game, such as fairness, as he talked about making a lineup that included everyone; teamwork; respect for others regardless of their ability; and how important it was to have fun. My dad had a rule as a coach that everyone got to play in every game, regardless of skill level. This rule helped us learn that having an opportunity to play was more important than winning.

While it did take a few summers for us to eventually learn this lesson, it seemed evident that some of the adults in the stands and parents of teammates had never learned this lesson. Each summer, my dad would receive at least one phone call from a parent questioning why his or her daughter did not get to start or was taken out at the end of the game. This parent would argue that the game was lost because his or her child was not in the game at a critical moment when perhaps a younger, less-experienced player was on the field or up to bat. My dad would calmly and carefully explain his coaching philosophy to the parent—that this was a recreational league, a chance for everyone to learn and grow, it was a team game, and, to him, the most important outcome was for everyone to have fun, which he did not think would happen if some players had to sit on the bench the whole season. Sometimes, after those phone calls, the parents would understand what he was saying and then they would appear more supportive of the whole team at games. Sometimes, however, the player would stop coming to practices and games.

As I think back over those years, and even to a similar phone call I received when I coached a couple of years ago, I cannot help but remember all of the key plays that were made by those players regarded as "not as good." More vividly, I remember the screams of joy and the feelings of confidence that were bursting from those players in these moments and the pride that was beaming from their parents' faces. It is these moments that reinforce to me how important it is not to forget to teach good sportsmanship when teaching the other basic skills of a game. This can sometimes be difficult to remember, however, when we see professional athletes fighting with each other, fans booing players at a stadium, and parents at little league games criticizing other players.

Benefits of Youth Sports Participation

It has been estimated that 22 million children and youth, ages 6 to 18, are involved in organized sports outside of school (Poinsett, 1996). Research

indicates that participation in sports can promote healthy development.

According to the American Sport Education Program (1994), sports participation:

- builds an appreciation of personal health and fitness,
- develops a positive self-image,
- teaches how to work as part of a team,
- develops social skills with other children and adults (such as taking turns and sharing playing time),
- teaches how to manage both success and disappointment, and
- teaches how to respect others.

In order to better understand these benefits, much of the research on youth sports has examined how sports enhance aspects of children's social development. Specifically, studies have examined how sports contribute to the development of *social competence*—the ability to get along with and be accepted by peers, family members, teachers, and coaches; and *self-esteem*—the extent to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy (Ewing, 1997).

According to the findings, children learn to assess their social competence in sports through the feedback received from parents and coaches (Ewing, 1997). Self-esteem, on the other hand, is developed through both evaluation of one's own abilities and evaluation of the responses received from others. Children actively observe parents' and coaches' responses to their performances by looking for signs (often nonverbal) of approval or disapproval of their behavior. Lack of feedback and criticism is often interpreted as a negative response to the behavior.

Because children often use social comparison as a way of determining their ability in sport, participation in youth sports activities provides children with many opportunities to determine their ability compared with others on their team (Ewing, 1997). Unfortunately, given the influence of other factors, such as maturation and previous knowledge of a sport, on one's ability to perform a sport skill, children often reach incorrect conclusions about their abilities. Thus, the role of parents and coaches is significant in helping children interpret their strengths and weaknesses in a sport.

What Is Sportsmanship?

Most younger children do not understand fully what is meant by sportsmanship. When one physical education teacher asks his class to explain sportsmanship, he hears such replies as: "Don't cheat," "Don't get mad or cry when you lose," or "Don't yell at your teammates when they make a mistake" (Sitz, 1998). Children often have a hard time understanding the concepts of competition, winning, and losing. This difficulty is understandable when you consider that children see all of the attention and rewards thrown toward winners, while losers do not receive such focus. The message that kids are learning, then, is that people are valued only if they are winners (Sitz, 1998).

On the other hand, most adults can explain sportsmanship by discussing respect for the game, the players, the rules, and the officials (Sitz, 1998). Adults can understand that it is O.K. to lose and that what is important is to do your best and strive to improve your own abilities. Despite adults' ability to understand the complexities of sportsmanship, some fail, for a variety of reasons, to display good sportsmanship. Some parents and adults get wrapped up in the competition because they are living vicariously through their children (Burnett, 1996). Others might have unrealistic expectations about their child, thinking she or he might be the next superstar. To ensure that children gain the benefits of sports participation, however, it is important for parents and coaches to evaluate and monitor their own attitudes and behaviors so that good sportsmanship is taught.

Ways to Promote Sportsmanship

Coaches and parents can promote good sportsmanship by:

- Maintaining a "Fun is number 1" attitude. If everyone is having fun, it'll make learning all aspects of the game more enjoyable and rewarding (Burnett, 1996).

- Designing sports activities that facilitate cooperation rather than just competition so that youth learn about fair play (Ewing, 1997).
- Teaching children the rules of the game and making sure that everyone (players, parents, fans) abides by those rules during competition (Ewing, 1997).
- Encouraging and supporting all players on a team (American Sport Education Program, 1994).
- Controlling emotions in frustrating situations (American Sport Education Program, 1994).
- Treating officials, coaches, players, teammates, and opponents with respect and avoiding ridicule and sarcasm (Burnett, 1996).
- Using moments from the game to teach about being a good sport ("I know it seemed like you got the runner at first out, but I was really proud of the way you didn't argue with the umpire.") (American Sport Education Program, 1994).
- Making sure there are consequences when poor sportsmanship is displayed (Sitz, 1998).
- Providing examples of good sportsmanship such as shaking hands with the opponent at the end of the game (Ewing, 1997).

Participation in youth sports provides numerous opportunities for healthy development physically, socially, and morally. The key to children gaining these benefits comes from coaches, parents, and other adults not only teaching children how to play the sport, but also supporting and demonstrating how to be a good sport. This instruction can be done not only during the game, but also when playing softball in the backyard.

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Adolescent Behavior: Resources for Additional Support

Anne S. Robertson

volume 4, number 7

We have recently received, through our Parents AskERIC service, a large number of calls from parents who are struggling with their adolescent's behavior. Many parents find it difficult to discern between normal adolescent moodiness or rebellion and more serious issues. Unlike early childhood development, for which there is a wide variety of parenting education and support programs, communities may have few if any parent education programs for the adolescent years. However, many parents and their children are unprepared for the sudden changes that occur in early adolescence, including rapid physical and psychological changes. According to Fenwick and Smith in their parenting book *Adolescence: The Survival Guide*, "Compared with adolescence, infancy is an island of development entirely surrounded by good advice" (Fenwick & Smith, 1996, p. 9). Parents of adolescents often do not have easy access to good advice, may tend to isolate themselves and minimize problems, or may be self-conscious about seeking out resources.

The problem may be further compounded by the messages portrayed through the media, the popular convention being that parents and teens have a naturally adversarial relationship (Riera, 1995, p. 1) and that parents become increasingly incompetent as the child matures through adolescence and into adulthood. Yet there is a wealth of research available that demonstrates how parenting style has a significant impact on child and adolescent behavior and that parents gain competence by having access to high-quality resources and parenting support programs (Baumrind, 1991; Glasgow et al., 1997).

Michael Riera in *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers* suggests that successful parenting of teens builds on the understanding that the parental role shifts from being the child's "manager" to a newer and less directive role of being the teen's "advisor or consultant" (Riera, 1995, pp. 5-8). Although this shift may be gradual and somewhat difficult for both parent and teen, it is not laissez-faire. The "consultant" role is more in line with an authoritative parenting style, which recognizes the importance of the long-term goal of assisting the teen with developing successful decision-making skills for adulthood. To avoid the common mistakes of "over-managing" or the opposite extreme of "abandonment," it is important to be present in your teen's life and listen to her concerns so that you can make the most of your "consultant" status. This is also a time to help your teen recognize the other people within his community with whom he can find support, and to help build a circle of positive role models who have regular contact with your teen.

Research from the Search Institute identifies approximately 40 "Developmental Assets" that should be present in healthy communities to support teens. These assets are identified as being "internal" (characteristics within the teen) and "external" (programs and support systems that should be available within the community) (40 Developmental Assets, 1996, p. 11). The more assets that a teen has in his or her life, the more likely it is that the teen years will be weathered with fewer serious upsets. Community relationships can be developed by encouraging friendships with families who have similar values, and by

seeking support from relatives, teachers, counselors, coaches, the religious community, and other community organizations. Parents may need to help the teen add to the circle of support during difficult times and to pull the circle tighter so that the teen has more structure built into his or her life.

However, even with the best intentions and parenting support, the teen years may feel like a roller coaster with emotional and behavioral peaks and valleys. It can be very difficult for parents to know the difference between innocent behavior (which warrants a serious talk), troubled behavior (acts that indicate the teen is likely to get into trouble), or problem behavior (attitudes and actions that indicate a serious disturbance and a need for immediate help). Cues that innocent behavior may be becoming more troubled or is turning into problem behavior include a significant change in school performance; substance abuse; inappropriate sexual behavior that violates family norms; a pattern of defiance including ignoring curfew, lying, stealing, destroying property, and carrying a weapon; frequent outbursts of anger or signs of depression; running away from home more than once; and repeated premeditated illegal behavior (Steinberg & Levine, 1997, pp. 315-326; Riera, 1995, pp. 207-210).

Conduct that is falling into the troubled area is a sign of a need for consistent attention and enforced limits. Clear standards for behavior may need to be reestablished, with the teen's input, along with clear consequences and a closer monitoring of behavior. However, if the teen is not listening, is falling into old patterns after a brief stage of compliance, you believe that health and safety are in jeopardy, or you feel powerless to stop the situation, then additional help is likely warranted. Your teen's physician is a good first step for finding the most appropriate professional referral such as a counselor, psychologist, or substance abuse program. Other resources may be friends, religious leaders, or a school counselor or principal (Riera, 1995, p. 207; Steinberg & Levine, 1997, pp. 324-326). During these times, it is helpful to remember the circle of support that is available to you through your extended community and to know that you are not alone. There are many families who struggle through periods of the adolescent roller-coaster years, and most of their children grow up to become contributing citizens and parents themselves.

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National Organizations and Web Sites

Boys Town National Hotline
Telephone: 800-448-3000
Internet:
http://www.ffbh.boystown.org/Hotline/hotline.html

National Runaway Switchboard
Telephone: 800-621-4000
Internet: http://www.babyplace.com/runaway.htm

Covenant House Nineline
Telephone: 800-999-9999
Internet: http://www.covenanthouse.org

Youth Crisis Hotline
Telephone: 800-448-4663

Search Institute
Telephone: 800-888-7828
Internet: http://www.search-institute.org

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) Public Information
Telephone: 202-966-7300
Internet: http://www.aacap.org

Parents Anonymous
Telephone: 800-421-0353
Internet: http://www.usakids.org/sites/pa.html

National Parent Information Network
Telephone: 800-583-4135
Internet: http://npin.org

Get It Straight: The Facts about Drugs
Internet:
http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/straight/cover.htm

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The **Blondins** have a variety of experiences in addition to their travel adventures. Mark earned his bachelor's degree in political science, worked for many years in the soft drink business, and is currently employed in the computer backup/mass storage industry. Betsy worked for many years as a legal secretary/assistant. She is completing her bachelor's degree, has been a reporter/photographer/copy editor for two northern Michigan newspapers, and is currently an editorial manager at a book publishing company. The children attend public school and are successful students. Stacy (13) and Kelly (13) swim competitively, and Donald (16) is on the varsity tennis team. The Blondin family lives in Carlsbad, California, near San Diego, and has published articles about their trip. They are working on a book and recently appeared on *Parent Soup,* an online parenting magazine.

Mary Karter is Teen Parent Services Coordinator/Family and Consumer Studies Specialist to Portland public schools. In this position she manages services to the pregnant/parenting teen program and to family and consumer studies classes. Mary holds an administrative certificate and health certification from Portland State University and received her M.S. in Education from Portland State. She was a teacher of home economics and health from 1967 to 1986, and has been co-chair of the Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force since 1996.

Lilian G. Katz is Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she is also Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary & Early Childhood Education. She is a Past President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and recently served as the Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Society for the Study of Education (USA). Dr. Katz is author of more than 100 publications including articles, chapters, and books about early childhood education, teacher education, child development, and parenting. She has also served as editor for several publications, including *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* and the new online journal *Early Childhood Research & Practice.*

Howard S. King has been a pediatrician in private practice for over 25 years and has held a National Institute of Mental Health fellowship in child psychiatry. He also serves as an instructor in pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, is on staff at Children's Hospital and Newton-Wellesley Hospital, and has worked with a number of health plans, including

Pilgrim and Aetna. A consultant to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, he is a member of the Bright Futures Panel to redirect the focus of pediatric care to include a broader concern for psychosocial issues and prevention of family problems.

Eva Lefkowitz received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from UCLA in 1998. She is Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. She is currently examining differences in the ways that mothers discuss dating and sexuality with their sons compared to their daughters, as well as the content of these conversations. In addition, she intends to examine what AIDS-related topics mothers and adolescents discuss, and whether mothers are likely to focus on abstinence versus safer sex when talking about protective behavior.

James May is the Project Director of the National Fathers' Network (NFN). Funded by a grant from the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau, the NFN advocates for fathers and families of children with special needs through training, development of mentoring and support programs, curriculum, a Web site, and a twice yearly newsletter. An educator and certified mental health counselor, James has been involved with families and young people for more than 30 years.

Michaelene M. Ostrosky is an Associate Professor in the Special Education Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Since joining the faculty in 1991, Michaelene has conducted research on the topics of transitions between programs and communication interventions for young children with severe disabilities. She has authored a number of publications on the topics of social interaction, communication interventions, and transition.

Dawn Ramsburg received a B.A. in Developmental Psychology from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, and an M.S. in Developmental Psychology from Illinois State University. She is currently a doctoral student in Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; her dissertation examines parental child care choices by investigating local child care resource and referral supply and demand data. Dawn has held two research assistantships at the University of Illinois; her work has included research and writing for the National Parent Information Network and *Parent News,* and work as a data specialist with the Child Care Resource Service, which serves six counties in east central Illinois.

Debbie A. Reese is a Pueblo Indian woman from Nambe, a small Pueblo in Northern New Mexico. She was raised on a reservation and took part in traditional spiritual aspects of the culture. Debbie attended public schools with classmates from three different cultural groups: Pueblo Indian, Hispanic, and Euro-American. At the time of this writing, Debbie is a student at the University of Illinois working on a doctorate in early childhood education with special interests in multicultural literature and family involvement in school. As a doctoral student, Debbie worked for NPIN as a staff writer and also taught social studies and children's literature in the College of Education. Prior to this, Debbie taught elementary school for eight years in public and private schools, teaching primarily

Native American or Latino(a) children in Oklahoma and New Mexico. Debbie and her husband George have one daughter, Elizabeth. Their experience as parents gives them direction in their work as teachers and influenced the articles Debbie chose to write for *Parent News*. Debbie's awareness of cultural diversity and children's interactions with peers not of their own background or ethnicity led to the article on young children and race.

Anne S. Robertson coordinates the development of the multiple services that are offered through the National Parent Information Network (NPIN). Over the past two decades, Anne has worked as a parent volunteer, teacher, home visitor, parent educator, and researcher. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Illinois and a master's degree in international educational development from Boston University, where she graduated with honors. She has had the opportunity to look at family and community development at the international level and in both rural and urban cultures. A key focus of Anne's interests is the development of successful educational systems that serve parents and families considered most at risk within the community.

ERIC Digests

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Twins in School: What Teachers Should Know

Lilian G. Katz

The incidence of multiple births has increased dramatically in the past two decades. The birth rate for twins, who constitute the most common kind of multiple births, increased 42% from 1980 to 1994 (Lytton, Singh, & Gallagher, 1995). Given this trend, it seems reasonable to assume that many teachers will have twins and other multiple siblings in their classes at some point in their classroom careers.

To a large extent, the available research on twins stems from a long tradition of studies focused on the nature–nurture debates. These studies look at twins reared together and apart and attempt to ascertain the relative influence of genetic and environmental influences on personality development. Research on the effects of twins' separation in school and other practical questions is as yet very limited. Nevertheless, difficult decisions about their education have to be made by school districts, principals, and teachers while new research is awaited. This Digest offers some pointers for educators facing the challenges of educating multiples.

Different Types of Twins and Other Multiples

There are two basic types of twins and other multiples. Identical twins are defined as monozygotic because they are the result of the split of a single fertilized ovum. Dizygotic twins, usually referred to as fraternal twins, are the result of the fertilization of two separate ova, as in other siblings born years apart. There are four types of identical twins, depending upon how early in the development of the ovum its division occurs. The earlier in the division, the more alike the individuals are likely to be physically. In the case of other multiples, as for example in the case of triplets, two of the three may be identical, but more typically all three are as different as any other three siblings.

These variations in the extent to which siblings from the same pregnancy resemble each other suggest that teachers may want to keep in mind that most multiples are as unique as any other set of siblings, although their psychosocial situation differs from that of singletons. Identical twins will be more behaviorally alike on average than fraternal twins. It is also the case that many multiple-birth children are born prematurely and have low birth weight. Many of the same kinds of problems typical of single premature low birth weight children will be typical of premature twins. However, for parents of multiples, even if they are not subject to the strains related to the risks of prematurity, the stresses and strains of the early care of multiples are substantial and appear to have some short-term effects on the children's development (Lytton, Singh, & Gallagher, 1995). Because twins are the most typical type of multiples, that term is used in the discussion below, although much of the discussion applies equally to other multiple-birth siblings.

Separating Twins in School

One of the most frequently asked questions by preschool and elementary teachers and principals is whether the classroom separation of multiples should be encouraged. Dreyer (1991) and Brodkin (1997) point out that many schools and preschool programs have a fixed policy of separating twins. In other schools, however, the decision may be left to the principal or to the teachers.

Is it necessary for schools and preschool programs to have a strict policy about separating twins? Dreyer concludes her discussion of what little research is available on this question by stating that "Twins feel that the best policy is no policy at all" (Dreyer, 1991, p. 6). Similarly, most parents seem to feel that such decisions should be determined on a case-by-case basis and that a rigid policy should be avoided.

Even in very small preschools and elementary schools that have only one class per age group, teachers often wonder if they should encourage the twins to engage in separate activities, participate in different learning center activities, sit at different tables for meals, and team up with other peers.

Making Separation Decisions

The Parents of Multiple Births Association, Inc., of Canada provides a list of possible circumstances to be considered when making a decision about separation (Dreyer, 1991, p. 11). Included in this list are questions such as whether the twins' "togetherness" might hinder the social development of one or both. Thus, parents and the teacher might ask whether, by about the age of 5, each of the twins is capable of initiating and maintaining satisfying relationships with nonsibling peers. If the answer is "yes," then separation would not be warranted. If the answer is "no," then separation, perhaps for part of the day, might be attempted on an experimental basis. Separation may also be considered under the following circumstances:

- Classmates engage in frequent comparisons of the pair, and the comparisons provoke negative feelings in either twin. Constant comparison of twins is one of the greatest sources of distress to twins and one of the most difficult things for parents and teachers to resist. Although parents, and even teachers, often compare different-age siblings, the fact that the twins are the same age as well as frequently of the same gender considerably heightens the temptation to draw comparisons. Even at the preschool age, twins are likely to be aware of such comparisons and may become more competitive than

other siblings. Most twins ultimately weather school situations successfully, but if one of the multiples typically comes out on the poorer end of these comparisons, a pattern of discouragement may develop and could lead to a pattern of "learned helplessness" (Burhans & Dweck, 1995).

- There is no evidence that twins are more disruptive than non-twins. However, if disruptions do occur and standard procedures for handling disruptive behavior fail to alleviate the pattern, separation might be one course of action to consider.
- A female twin "over-mothers" her male co-twin. In the case of fraternal opposite-sex twins, females tend to be the more dominant of the two and more critical of their twin brothers, who "appreciated their twin sister's guidance but felt somewhat threatened by their 'superiority'" (Dreyer, 1991, p. 3).
- Many twins develop a pattern of helping each other through both academic and social predicaments. Educators might want to consider how separation will affect twins who are accustomed to helping each other. Teachers might observe the twins closely in the classroom to ensure that one twin does not help the other excessively, or that the one being helped does not become too dependent on the other. In the case of preschoolers, perhaps the best advice is to make the separation gradual, if it is done at all.

There are other situations in which separation might be a poor or untimely decision. For example, if the pair is undergoing particular stresses within the family, or if there are health concerns for one or both twins, separation may place unnecessary stress on twins.

In the case of school-age twins, it is a good idea to check their own preferences about separation. Although their feelings on the issue should be considered, these feelings should be put in a larger perspective of the long-term development of each member of the multiple sibling group.

Placement decisions should also take into account the views of parents. Some parents will have strong feelings on the matter (Segal & Russell, 1992). However, it is a good idea to keep in mind that parents may not be fully aware of how their children behave in the classroom environment. If parents disagree on the best course of action, teachers may want to listen carefully to each, make suggestions for them to consider, invite them to observe their children in the classroom, and suggest a short-term experiment of separating or keeping the twins together. During that time, the twins can be closely observed and evaluated by teachers and parents. In this way, the school personnel and the parents can address the issue as a team focused on the long-term best interests of the children.

Look Alikes

Ideally, as suggested by guidelines for the education of multiple birth children recently issued by the National Organization of Mothers of Twins Club, Inc. (1998), educators should learn to recognize each child in a set of multiples without resorting to extraordinary measures, such as requiring identical twins to wear name tags, different color clothes, or different hair styles. However, for teachers struggling with large classes, this ideal may take much time and effort to achieve. In the case of twins who look very much alike, and who often behave alike, a teacher's inability to distinguish between the twins and to use the correct name of the child may be a source of stress for the children and the teacher. It may be preferable to consult the parents about the possibility of helping the teacher to make the correct identification by dressing the twins differently, giving them different haircuts or shirt colors, or providing other consistently different patterns in their appearance. Speaking as a twin, the experience of being called by the other's name can be very annoying!

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He Has a Summer Birthday: The Kindergarten Entrance Age Dilemma

Sandra Crosser

David would be 5 in July. Full of enthusiasm, he confidently underwent spring kindergarten screening. The school psychologist explained that David completed the screening with average and above-average skills, but he had a summer birthday and he was a male. The psychologist and the gym teacher agreed that David would be more successful in school if he were to postpone kindergarten for 1 year.

David's experience has been repeated over and over by many children across the country. Educators are commonly recommending that children born during the summer months be given an extra year to mature so that they will not suffer from the academic disadvantages of being among the youngest children in a class. Terms such as "academic red-shirting" and "graying of the kindergarten" have been invented to describe the practice and effects of holding children back from kindergarten (Bracey, 1989; Suro, 1992).

Small-scale studies of limited geographic areas suggest that delayed kindergarten entrance involves anywhere from 9% to 64% of the eligible kindergarten population (Meisels, 1992). However, data collected for the large-scale National Household Education Survey (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1997) indicated that 9% of the first- and second-graders had been held back from kindergarten. Surveyed parents reported that children who had delayed kindergarten entrance 1 year were most likely to have been male (64%), white (73%), and born between July and December (70%). Compared to children born in the first quarter of the year, children born in the summer months were twice as likely to have delayed kindergarten entrance 1 year after they were first eligible.

Substantial numbers of parents and educators believe that children born in the summer months will gain an academic advantage if kindergarten entrance is delayed 1 year. Is it a disadvantage to be among the youngest, rather than the oldest, in a kindergarten class?

What Does the Research Reveal?

A review of the relevant literature reveals that few studies have been undertaken to examine whether or not children with summer birthdays do better academically when they postpone kindergarten entrance 1 year. Problems also arise because some of the research often cited in support of delayed entrance is poorly designed, has focused on children with learning disabilities or on early entrants, has relied on subjective parent or teacher reports, or has not looked specifically at children born during the summer months.

The related research is meager and somewhat contradictory. In general, studies indicate that the youngest children in a class may score slightly below the oldest children in a class, but any differences tend to be small and may be transitory (Morrison, Griffith, & Alberts, 1997; Cameron & Wilson, 1990; Kinard & Reinherz, 1986; Smith & Shepard, 1987; NCES, 1997).

The sparsity of evidence related specifically to summer-born children prompted an investigation comparing the academic achievement of two groups of children born in June, July, August, or September: those who entered kindergarten just after turning 5 and those who were held out 1 year and entered kindergarten at age 6 (Crosser, 1991). Each child who delayed entrance was matched with a child of like intelligence who had not delayed entrance. Boys were matched with boys, and girls with girls.

All of the children took standardized achievement tests during fifth or sixth grade. Those test scores were used to compare the achievement of summer-born, held-out children to that of summer-born children who had entered school on time.

Results of the study indicated that, given similar levels of intelligence, boys with summer birth dates tended to be advantaged academically by postponing kindergarten entrance 1 year. That advantage was greatest in the area of reading. Reading scores for females and math scores for both males and females did not show significant statistical differences.

Results of such small-scale studies need to be replicated before educators will be able to make informed recommendations about optimum kindergarten entrance age. There is no clear-cut evidence that delaying kindergarten for the youngest entrants will provide some magical academic advantage. Because there is so little entrance age evidence, and because some of that evidence is conflicting, there does not appear to be a strong academic basis for delaying kindergarten entrance for summer-born children.

A responsible physician would not recommend any treatment that had not been scientifically tested and retested for effectiveness. She would need to know the specific symptoms for which the treatment was effective. She would need to know the success rate of the treatment and what complicating side effects and interactions were possible before prescribing the treatment.

Responsible educators also have a need to know the facts before recommending treatment for a child whose only symptoms are being born in July and being male. Nevertheless, the reality is that both teachers and parents are accepting the idea that delaying school entrance for summer birth date children is sound practice.

How Does Holding Out Affect the Kindergarten Experience?

It has been reported that affluent parents tend to hold out their summer-born children more often than do low socioeconomic status parents (Meisels, 1992). If that is the case, then children who may be at academic risk from factors associated with poverty face the additional hurdle of being compared to advantaged children who are 12 to 15 months older. We should expect that the economically disadvantaged children may be outperformed by their classmates who are both chronologically and developmentally their seniors.

In the real-life kindergarten classroom, the youngest children may appear to be immature and unready to tackle the tasks that their significantly older classmates find challenging and intriguing. As the curriculum and academic expectations increase to meet the needs of the 6-year-old children, there is a real danger that the kindergarten program will become developmentally inappropriate for the very young children it is meant to serve.

Did David's Parents Make the Right Decision?

David is 15 now. When he was 13, he towered above his classmates as he walked through the halls. The school desks just didn't fit his 6'3" body, and many of his teachers assumed that he must have been retained since he was older than the other students. When asked what grade he is in, David always makes it a point to explain that he started kindergarten late.

But David is well liked by students and teachers. He moved into both puberty and formal operational thought sooner than his classmates, earning their admiration. Academically, David does average and above-average work with minimal effort.

Did David's parents make the right decision in holding him out from kindergarten? They don't know. They will probably never know, but David thinks he knows the answer.

Conclusion

Academic achievement is only one piece of the school entrance age puzzle. The child's physical, social, and emotional development are key pieces, as well. It would seem to be the course of wisdom to consider the whole child in all of his or her aspects when making decisions about school entrance. The answers are not simple. They are further complicated because each child is different biologically and emotionally. Each child brings his own special characteristics with him as he lives and works through his unique life experiences.

The counsel of educators can bring about life-changing events in a young child's world. Blanket recommendations to hold back one group of children only serve to change who will be part of the youngest group. As educators, we must resist the urge to follow the unfounded advice of those who would recommend uniform practices that would exclude any group of children from our schools. Educators must consider the individual child as we continue to build a stronger knowledge base upon which to make entrance age decisions.

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Father Involvement in Schools

Christine Winquist Nord

Until recently, fathers were the hidden parent in research on children's well-being. Their importance to children's financial well-being was widely accepted, but their contribution to other aspects of children's development was often assumed to be secondary to that of mothers and was not usually examined. Reflecting this bias in research on child development, many federal agencies, and programs dealing with family issues, focused almost exclusively on mothers and their children. In 1995, President Clinton issued a memorandum requesting that all executive departments and agencies make a concerted effort to include fathers in their programs, policies, and research programs where appropriate and feasible (Clinton, 1995). Research stimulated by the new interest in fathers suggests that fathers' involvement in their children's schools does make a difference in their children's education (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

This Digest looks at the extent to which fathers are involved in their children's schools and the link between fathers' involvement and kindergartners' through 12th-graders' school performance, using data from the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96).

1996 National Household Education Survey

The NHES:96 was sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The involvement of fathers in two-parent and in father-only families is presented and contrasted with that of mothers in two-parent and in mother-only families. Information related to the link between father involvement and student achievement is presented for children living in two-parent and in father-only households. (The analyses are restricted to children living with biological, step, or adoptive fathers. Children living with foster fathers are excluded.)

The NHES:96 asked about four types of school activities that parents could participate in during the school year: attending a general school meeting, attending a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, attending a school or class event, and serving as a volunteer at the school. Parents are said to have low involvement in their children's schools if they have participated in none or only one of the four activities during the current school year. They are categorized as having moderate involvement if they have participated in at least two of the available activities. Those who have participated in three or four of the activities are said to be highly involved in their children's schools. (Not all schools offer parents the opportunity to be involved in each of these activities. Low involvement may be due to failure to take advantage of available opportunities for involvement or because schools do not offer parents opportunities for involvement.)

The Extent of Father Involvement

Two-Parent Families

The proportion of children living in two-parent families with highly involved fathers is about half of the proportion with highly involved mothers—27% and 56%, respectively. In other words, in two-parent families, children are twice as likely to have mothers who are highly involved than to have fathers who are highly involved in their children's schools. Nearly half of children in two-parent families have fathers who participated in none or only one of the four activities since the beginning of the school year. In contrast, only 21% of children living in two-parent families have mothers with such low participation in their schools.

Single-Parent Families

Children living with single fathers or with single mothers are about equally likely to have parents who are highly involved in their schools—46% and 49%, respectively. Both fathers and mothers who head single-parent families have levels of involvement in their children's schools that are quite similar to mothers in two-parent families and are much higher than fathers in two-parent families.

Types of Involvement

In two-parent families, there are two activities for which fathers' involvement approaches that of mothers: attendance at school or class events (such as a play, science fair, or sports event) and attendance at general school meetings. Fathers may find it easier to attend these types of activities because they are more likely than the other two to occur during nonschool and nonwork hours. Fathers in father-only families are more likely than fathers in two-parent families to participate in these and other activities, so work constraints are not the sole explanation for low involvement among fathers in two-parent families.

Father Involvement and Student Achievement

Policymakers and educators agree that family involvement in children's education is closely linked to children's school success (U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Many policymakers, school officials, and families, however, often assume that family involvement means that mothers' involvement in schools is important. This assumption has some basis in fact in that mothers are more likely than fathers to be highly involved in their children's schools, and the extent of their involvement is strongly related to children's school performance and adjustment (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). However, an important question is, does fathers' involvement matter, as well?

Father Participation in Two-Parent Families

Half of students get mostly A's and enjoy school, according to their parents, when their fathers are highly involved in their schools compared to about one-third of students when their fathers have low levels of involvement. Students are also half as likely to have ever repeated a grade (7% vs. 15%) and are significantly less likely to have ever been suspended or expelled (10% vs. 18%) if their fathers have high as opposed to low involvement in their schools.

After taking into account such factors as mothers' involvement, fathers' and mothers' education, household income, and children's race/ethnicity, it was found that children are still more likely to get A's, participate in extracurricular activities, enjoy school, and are less likely to have ever repeated a grade if their fathers are involved in their schools compared to if they are not (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

After taking into account these other factors, it was found that mothers' involvement, but not fathers' involvement, is associated with a reduced likelihood of 6th- through 12th-graders having ever been suspended or expelled.

Father-Only Households

Children living in single-parent households are, on average, less successful in school and experience more behavior problems than children living in two-parent households (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Most research on single-parenthood focuses on children living with single mothers. However, children living in father-only households also do less well in school than children living in two-parent households.

Results also reveal that children in father-only households do better in school, are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, enjoy school more, and are less likely to have ever been suspended or expelled if their fathers are highly involved in their schools compared to if they have only low levels of involvement. Nearly one-third of students get mostly A's when their fathers are highly involved in their schools compared to 17% when their fathers have low levels of involvement in their schools. Even more striking, only 11% of 6th- through 12th-graders have ever been suspended or expelled when their fathers have high levels of involvement in their schools compared to 34% when their fathers have low levels of involvement in their schools. Although a similar pattern is observed for grade repetition, the difference between children whose fathers have high and low levels of involvement is not statistically significant.

Even after controlling for such factors as fathers' education, family income, and children's race/ethnicity, it was found that children do better in school and are less likely to have ever been suspended or expelled if their fathers have high as opposed to low levels of involvement in their schools.

Conclusions

The observed patterns of fathers' involvement in their children's schools, linked to family structure, are consistent with existing research (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996) and with the notion that there is a division of labor in two-parent families, with mothers taking more responsibility for child-related tasks, whereas in single-parent families the lone parent assumes the responsibility. Fathers and mothers in two-parent families may be operating under the mistaken assumption that fathers do not matter as much as mothers when it comes to involvement in their children's school. The results also support research showing that single fathers and mothers are more similar in their parenting behavior than are mothers and fathers in two-parent families (Thomson, McLanahan, & Curtin, 1992).

The low participation of fathers in two-parent families offers schools an opportunity to increase overall parental involvement. By targeting fathers, schools may be able to make greater gains in parental involvement than by targeting mothers or parents, in general. This is not to say that schools should not continue to welcome mothers' involvement, but because mothers already exhibit relatively high levels of participation in their children's schools, there is less room to increase their involvement.

The involvement of fathers in their children's schools is also important for children's achievement and behavior. In two-parent households, fathers' involvement in their children's schools has a distinct and independent influence on children's achievement over and above that of mothers. These findings show that fathers can be a positive force in their children's education, and that when they do get involved, their children are likely to do better in school. Unfortunately, many fathers are relatively uninvolved in their children's schools (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). These results should encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's schools and encourage schools to welcome fathers' involvement.

Adapted from: Nord, Christine Winquist. (1998, April). How involved are fathers in their children's schools? *and* Students do better when their fathers are involved at school. (*Issue Briefs NCES 98-120 & 98-121). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.*

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Loneliness in Young Children

Janis R. Bullock

Loneliness is a significant problem that can predispose young children to immediate and long-term negative consequences. However, only recently have research and intervention in educational settings focused on young children who are lonely. It is becoming increasingly clear that many young children understand the concept of loneliness and report feeling lonely. For example, kindergarten and first-grade children responded appropriately to a series of questions regarding what loneliness is ("being sad and alone"), where it comes from ("nobody to play with"), and what one might do to overcome feelings of loneliness ("find a friend") (Cassidy & Asher, 1992). In a more recent study (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996), kindergarten children's loneliness in school was reliably measured with a series of questions such as, "Are you lonely in school?"; "Is school a lonely place for you?"; and "Are you sad and alone in school?" These studies suggest that young children's concepts of loneliness have meaning to them and are similar to those shared by older children and adults. This Digest presents an overview of loneliness with suggestions for practitioners on how they can apply the research in early childhood settings.

Consequences of Loneliness

Children who feel lonely often experience poor peer relationships and therefore express more loneliness than peers with friends. They often feel excluded—a feeling that can be damaging to their self-esteem. In addition, they may experience feelings of sadness, malaise, boredom, and alienation. Furthermore, early childhood experiences that contribute to loneliness may predict loneliness during adulthood. Consequently, lonely children may miss out on many opportunities to interact with their peers and to learn important lifelong skills. Given the importance placed on the benefits of peer interactions and friendships to children's development, this potential lack of interaction raises many concerns for teachers who work with young children. Peer relations matter to children, and lonely children place as much importance on them as do other children (Ramsey, 1991).

Contributing Factors of Loneliness

Several factors contribute to feelings of loneliness in young children. Some that occur outside of the school setting are conflict within the home; moving to a new school or neighborhood; losing a friend; losing an object, possession, or pet; experiencing the divorce of parents; or experiencing the death of a pet or significant person. Equally important are factors that occur within the child's school setting, such as being rejected by peers; lacking social skills and knowledge of how to make friends; or possessing personal characteristics (e.g., shyness, anxiety, and low self-esteem) that contribute to difficulties in making friends. Kindergarten children who are victimized by peers (e.g., picked on, or physically or verbally attacked or taunted) report higher levels of loneliness, distress, and negative attitudes toward school than nonvictimized children (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996).

Observing and Assessing Young Children

Participating in careful observation of children is a necessary first step to gain insights into children's loneliness. While observing children, teachers can focus on the following, which may suggest signs of loneliness: Does the child appear timid, anxious, unsure of himself or herself, or sad? Does the child show a lack of interest in the surroundings? Does the child seem to be rejected by playmates? Does the child avoid other children by choice? Does the child appear to lack social skills that might prevent him or her from initiating or maintaining interactions? Does the child have the necessary social skills but is reluctant to use them? Is the child victimized by peers? Does the child's apparent loneliness seem to be a consistent pattern over time, or is it a more recent phenomenon? In addition, because loneliness cannot always be observed in children (e.g., there are children who appear to have friends but report feeling lonely), teachers can spend time talking individually with children. They might ask children, "What does sad and lonely mean?"; "Are you sad and lonely?"; or "What would make you happier?" (Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996).

When observing and assessing children, it is important to be sensitive to and aware of their developmental abilities and personal inclinations. For example, it has been suggested that young children who play alone may be at increased risk for later problems, both socially and cognitively. Many preschool and kindergarten children, however, engage in nonsocial activities that are highly predictive of competence. Therefore, over time, teachers need to observe children's interactions with their peers, talk to children about their feelings, and document their behaviors and responses to determine whether they are lonely or are happily and productively self-engaged.

Intervention Strategies and Recommendations

Although research in support of specific practices assisting lonely children in the classroom is weak, teachers might consider several approaches that may be adapted to individual children. Children who are aggressive report the greatest degrees of loneliness and social dissatisfaction (Asher, Parkhurst, Hymel, & Williams, 1990). Children are rejected for many reasons, and teachers will need to assess the circumstances that seem to lead to the rejection. Is the

child acting aggressively toward others? Does the child have difficulty entering ongoing play and adapting to the situation? Does the child have difficulty communicating needs and desires? Once the problem is identified, teachers can assist the child in changing the situation. The teacher can point out the effects of the child's behavior on others, show the child how to adapt to the ongoing play, or help the child to clearly communicate feelings and desires. Children who are supported, nurtured, and cherished are less likely to be rejected and more likely to interact positively with peers (Honig & Wittmer, 1996).

Children who are neglected or withdrawn also report feelings of loneliness, although to a lesser extent than do aggressive-rejected children. Because these children often lack social skills, they have difficulty interacting with their peers. These children may also be extremely shy, inhibited, and anxious, and they may lack self-confidence (Rubin, LeMare, & Lollis, 1990). If children lack certain skills, the teacher can focus on giving feedback, suggestions, and ideas that the child can implement. Children who possess adequate social skills but are reluctant to use them can be given opportunities for doing so by being paired with younger children. This experience gives the older child an opportunity to practice skills and boost self-confidence.

Children who are victimized by others believe that school is an unsafe and threatening place and often express a dislike for school. Furthermore, these children report lingering feelings of loneliness and a desire to avoid school even when victimization ceases (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). These findings point to the importance of implementing immediate intervention strategies to reduce victimization. Teachers can provide firm but supportive suggestions to the aggressor. For example, teachers might guide and assist children in developing the life skills they need, such as respecting others and self, engaging in problem solving, working together on skills and tasks that require cooperation, and expressing feelings and emotions in appropriate ways (Gartrell, 1997).

Teachers can think about how the curricula might be helpful to a child who is feeling lonely. Some children may benefit by being given opportunities to express their feelings of sadness or loneliness through manipulation, drawing, movement, music, or creative activities (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). Arranging the dramatic play area with props may help some children act out or express their feelings and feel a sense of control. Use of crisis-oriented books with children, referred to as bibliotherapy, may assist a child in coping with a personal crisis. Sharing carefully selected literature with children may assist in facilitating emotional health. Children who are able to express and articulate their concerns may want to talk about their unhappiness.

Developing close relationships with children and communicating with their primary caregivers can give teachers valuable insights and guidance. When teachers become aware of children who are experiencing loneliness caused by a family situation, they can lend their support in a variety of ways. Spending extra time listening can be reassuring and helpful to some children. Suggesting to a parent the possibility of inviting a peer over to the child's home may be a good idea and may help the child to form a friendship. In addition, teachers can ask parents for their recommendations about what might make the child feel more comfortable at school, and they can share relevant resources with parents, such as literature or information on parent discussion groups.

Conclusion

The issues of loneliness were once considered relevant only to adolescents and adults. Research suggests that this notion is misguided and that a small but significant portion of young children do in fact experience feelings of loneliness (Asher, Parkhurst, Hymel, & Williams, 1990). As a result, the immediate and long-term negative consequences associated with loneliness in children are becoming apparent, and the need to observe children and to develop and implement intervention strategies is becoming critical. When teachers take time to focus on individual needs of children, build relationships, and assist them with their needs, children thrive (Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997).

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Television Violence: Content, Context, and Consequences

Amy Aidman

Social science research conducted over the past 40 years supports the conclusion that viewing violent television programming has negative consequences for children, and the research suggests three areas in which watching violent television programs can impact young viewers:

1. Media violence can encourage children to learn aggressive behavior and attitudes.
2. Media violence can cultivate fearful or pessimistic attitudes in children about the non-television world.
3. Media violence can desensitize children to real-world and fantasy violence.

According to Eron (1992), "(t)here can no longer be any doubt that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime, and violence in society. The evidence comes from both the laboratory and real-life studies. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socio-economic levels and all levels of intelligence. The effect is not limited to children who are already disposed to being aggressive and is not restricted to this country" (p. 1).

This digest reports recent findings on violent television content, highlights the recently developed television ratings system, and offers suggestions for parental guidance and mediation of children's viewing of television programs.

Not All Violence Is Equal

The National Television Violence Study (NTVS) is the largest study of media content ever undertaken. It is a three-year study that assesses the amount, nature, and context of violence in entertainment programming, examines the effectiveness of ratings and advisories, and reviews televised anti-violence educational initiatives. The study, which began in 1994 and is funded by the National Cable Television Association, defines television violence as "any overt depiction of the use of physical force—or credible threat of physical force—intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings. Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent means" (National Television Violence Study, Executive Summary, 1996, p. ix).

Not all violence is equal, however. While some violent content can convey an anti-violence message, it is typical to sanitize, glamorize, or even glorify violence on U.S. television. According to the National Television Violence Study (Federman, 1997), only 4% of programs coded had a strong anti-violence theme in the 1995-96 season. In the two years of the study that have been reported, 58% (1994-95) and 61% (1995-96) of programs coded contained some violence.

Certain plot elements in portrayals of violence are considered high risk for children and should be evaluated by parents when judging possible program effects for children. Characterizations in which the perpetrator is attractive are especially problematic because viewers may identify with such a character. Other high-risk factors include showing violence as being justified, going unpunished, and having minimal consequences to the victim. Realistic violence is also among the high-risk plot elements.

NTVS findings from 1995-96 indicate that these high-risk plot elements abound in U.S. broadcast and cable television. Of all violent acts, 40% were committed by attractive characters, and 75% of violent actions went unpenalized and the perpetrators showed no remorse. In 37% of the programs, the "bad guys" were not punished, and more than half of all violent incidents did not show the suffering of the victim.

Based on reviews of social science research, it is possible to predict some effects of violent viewing in conjunction with specific plot elements:

Aggressive Behavior. Learning to use aggressive behavior is predicted to increase when the perpetrator is attractive, the violence is justified, weapons are present, the violence is graphic or extensive, the violence is realistic, the violence is rewarded, or the violence is presented in a humorous fashion. Conversely, the learning of aggression is inhibited by portrayals that show that violence is unjustified, show perpetrators of violence punished, or show the painful results of violence.

Fearful Attitudes. The effects of fearful attitudes about the real world may be increased by a number of features, including attractive victims of violence; unjustified violence; graphic, extensive, or realistic violence; and rewards to the perpetrator of violence. According to the work of George Gerbner and his colleagues (1980), heavy viewers of violent content believe their world is meaner, scarier, and more dangerous than their lighter-viewing counterparts. When violence is punished on television, the expected effect is a decrease in fearful attitudes about the real world.

Desensitization. Desensitization to violence refers to the idea of increased toleration of violence. It is predicted from exposure to extensive or graphic portrayals and humorous portrayals of violence and is of particular concern as a long-term effect for heavy viewers of violent content. Some of the most violent programs are children's animated series in which violence is routinely intended to be funny, and realistic consequences of violence are not shown.

Viewer Differences

Just as not all violence is equal, there are distinctions to be made among viewers. Characteristics such as age, experience, cognitive development, and temperament should be considered as individual factors that can interact with the viewing of violent content. Very young children, for example, have an understanding of fantasy and reality different from that of older children and adults. They may be more frightened by fantasy violence because they do not fully understand that it is not real. When parents consider their children's viewing, both age and individual differences should be taken into account.

Using Television Ratings as Guidelines

As a result of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a ratings system has been developed by the television industry in collaboration with child advocacy organizations. It is currently in use by some of the networks. Eventually ratings will also be used in conjunction with the V-chip, a device that can be programmed to electronically block selected programming. Beginning in 1998, new television sets are to include V-chip technology.

Ratings categories are based on a combination of age-related and content factors as listed below. These ratings may help parents determine what they consider appropriate for their children to watch. However, it is important to consider that ratings may make programs appear more attractive to some children, possibly creating a "forbidden fruit" appeal. Furthermore, critics point out the potentially problematic nature of having the television industry rate its own programs, and these critics support the development of alternative rating systems by non-industry groups.

TV-Y: All Children

TV-Y7: Directed to Older Children

TV-G: General Audience

TV-PG: Parental Guidance Suggested

TV-14: Parents Strongly Cautioned

TV-MA: Mature Audience Only

A content advisory for fantasy violence, **FV,** may be added to the **TV-Y7** rating. Several content codes may be added to the **TV-PG, TV-14,** and **TV-MA** ratings. These are **V** for intense violence; **S** for intense sexual situations; **L** for strong, coarse language; and **D** for intensely suggestive dialogue.

Beyond Ratings: What Can Parents Do?

Parents can be effective in reducing the negative effects of viewing television in general and violent television in particular.

1. *Watch television with your child.* Not only does watching television with children provide parents with information about what children are seeing, but active discussion and explanation of television programs can increase children's comprehension of content, reduce stereotypical thinking, and increase prosocial behavior.

2. *Turn the program off.* If a portrayal is upsetting, simply turn off the television and discuss your reason for doing so with your child.

3. *Limit viewing.* Set an amount of time for daily or weekly viewing (suggested maximum limit is 2 hours per day), and select programs that are appropriate for the child's age.

4. *Use television program guides or a VCR.* Television program guides can be used to plan and discuss viewing with your child. A VCR is useful for screening programs, building a video library for children, pausing to discuss points, and fast-forwarding through commercials.

5. *Encourage children to be critical of messages they encounter when watching television.* Talking about TV violence gives children alternative ways to think about it. Parents can point out differences between fantasy and reality in depictions of violence. They can also help children understand that in real life, violence is not funny. Discussion of issues underlying what is on the screen can help children to become critical viewers.

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ERIC DIGEST
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Helping Young Children Deal with Anger

Marian Marion

Children's anger presents challenges to teachers committed to constructive, ethical, and effective child guidance. This Digest explores what we know about the components of children's anger, factors contributing to understanding and managing anger, and the ways teachers can guide children's expressions of anger.

Three Components of Anger

Anger is believed to have three components (Lewis & Michalson, 1983):

The Emotional State of Anger. The first component is the emotion itself, defined as an affective or arousal state, or a feeling experienced when a goal is blocked or needs are frustrated. Fabes and Eisenberg (1992) describe several types of stress-producing anger provocations that young children face daily in classroom interactions:

- *Conflict over possessions,* which involves someone taking children's property or invading their space.
- *Physical assault,* which involves one child doing something to another child, such as pushing or hitting.
- *Verbal conflict,* for example, a tease or a taunt.
- *Rejection,* which involves a child being ignored or not allowed to play with peers.
- *Issues of compliance,* which often involve asking or insisting that children do something that they do not want to do—for instance, wash their hands.

Expression of Anger. The second component of anger is its expression. Some children *vent* or express anger through facial expressions, crying, sulking, or talking, but do little to try to solve a problem or confront the provocateur. Others *actively resist* by physically or verbally defending their positions, self-esteem, or possessions in nonaggressive ways. Still other children express anger with *aggressive revenge* by physically or verbally retaliating against the provocateur. Some children *express dislike* by telling the offender that he or she cannot play or is not liked. Other children express anger through *avoidance* or attempts to escape from or evade the provocateur. And some children use *adult seeking*, looking for comfort or solutions from a teacher, or telling the teacher about an incident.

Teachers can use child guidance strategies to help children express angry feelings in socially constructive ways. Children develop ideas about how to express emotions (Michalson & Lewis, 1985; Russel, 1989) primarily through social interaction in their families and later by watching television or movies, playing video games, and reading books (Honig & Wittmer, 1992). Some children have learned a negative, aggressive approach to expressing anger (Cummings, 1987; Hennessy et al., 1994) and, when confronted with everyday anger conflicts, resort to using aggression in the classroom (Huesmann, 1988). A major challenge for early childhood teachers is to encourage children to acknowledge angry feelings and to help them learn to express anger in positive and effective ways.

An Understanding of Anger. The third component of the anger experience is understanding—interpreting and evaluating—the emotion. Because the ability to regulate the expression of anger is linked to an understanding of the emotion (Zeman & Shipman, 1996), and because children's ability to reflect on their anger is somewhat limited, children need guidance from teachers and parents in understanding and managing their feelings of anger.

Understanding and Managing Anger

The development of basic cognitive processes undergirds children's gradual development of the understanding of anger (Lewis & Saarni, 1985).

Memory. Memory improves substantially during early childhood (Perlmutter, 1986), enabling young children to better remember aspects of anger-arousing interactions. Children who have developed unhelpful ideas of how to express anger (Miller & Sperry, 1987) may retrieve the early unhelpful strategy even after teachers help them gain a more helpful perspective. This finding implies that teachers may have to remind some children, sometimes more than once or twice, about the less aggressive ways of expressing anger.

Language. Talking about emotions helps young children understand their feelings (Brown & Dunn, 1996). The understanding of emotion in preschool children is predicted by overall language ability (Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994). Teachers can expect individual differences in the ability to identify and label angry feelings because children's families model a variety of approaches in talking about emotions.

Self-referential and self-regulatory behaviors. Self-referential behaviors include viewing the self as separate from others and as an active, independent, causal agent. Self-regulation refers to controlling impulses, tolerating frustration, and postponing immediate gratification. Initial self-regulation in young children provides a base for early childhood teachers who can develop strategies to nurture children's emerging ability to regulate the expression of anger.

Guiding Children's Expressions of Anger

Teachers can help children deal with anger by guiding their understanding and management of this emotion. The

practices described here can help children understand and manage angry feelings in a direct and nonaggressive way.

Create a safe emotional climate. A healthy early childhood setting permits children to acknowledge all feelings, pleasant and unpleasant, and does not shame anger. Healthy classroom systems have clear, firm, and flexible boundaries.

Model responsible anger management. Children have an impaired ability to understand emotion when adults show a lot of anger (Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994). Adults who are most effective in helping children manage anger model responsible management by acknowledging, accepting, and taking responsibility for their own angry feelings and by expressing anger in direct and nonaggressive ways.

Help children develop self-regulatory skills. Teachers of infants and toddlers do a lot of self-regulation "work," realizing that the children in their care have a very limited ability to regulate their own emotions. As children get older, adults can gradually transfer control of the self to children, so that they can develop self-regulatory skills.

Encourage children to label feelings of anger. Teachers and parents can help young children produce a label for their anger by teaching them that they are having a *feeling* and that *they can use a word* to describe their angry feeling. A permanent record (a book or chart) can be made of lists of labels for anger (e.g., mad, irritated, annoyed), and the class can refer to it when discussing angry feelings.

Encourage children to talk about anger-arousing interactions. Preschool children better understand anger and other emotions when adults explain emotions (Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994). When children are embroiled in an anger-arousing interaction, teachers can help by listening without judging, evaluating, or ordering them to feel differently.

Use books and stories about anger to help children understand and manage anger. Well-presented stories about anger and other emotions validate children's feelings and give information about anger (Jalongo, 1986; Marion, 1995). It is important to preview all books about anger because some stories teach irresponsible anger management.

Communicate with parents. Some of the same strategies employed to talk with parents about other areas of the curriculum can be used to enlist their assistance in helping children learn to express emotions. For example, articles about learning to use words to label anger can be included in a newsletter to parents.

Children guided toward responsible anger management are more likely to understand and manage angry feelings directly and nonaggressively and to avoid the stress often accompanying poor anger management (Eisenberg et al., 1991). Teachers can take some of the bumps out of understanding and managing anger by adopting positive guidance strategies.

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Developmentally Appropriate Practice: What Does Research Tell Us?

Loraine Dunn and Susan Kontos

Those who advocate for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) do so based on the conviction that these classroom practices enhance children's development and facilitate learning. This ERIC Digest examines recent research on DAP and social-emotional and cognitive development, and describes what we have learned about DAP in early childhood classrooms.

Social-Emotional Development

Given the context in which the National Association for the Education of Young Children's original position statement was released, namely Elkind's (1981) discussion of the "hurried child," it is not surprising that the earliest studies on developmentally appropriate practice focused on stress and emotional development. Two research teams documented that children exhibit more stress in didactic environments than in child-initiated environments. In the Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, and Rescorla study (1990), preschool children enrolled in child-initiated programs displayed lower levels of test anxiety than children enrolled in academic programs, regardless of parental preferences for classroom approaches. In the second study (Burts et al., 1990), children in inappropriate classrooms exhibited more total stress behaviors throughout the day and more stress behaviors during group times and workbook/worksheet activities.

Cognitive Development

Turning now to cognitive development, we focus on creativity, language development, children's perceptions of their cognitive competence, and traditional measures of achievement. Classrooms characterized by child initiation appear to facilitate children's creative development. The Hyson research team found that children in child-initiated classrooms scored higher on measures of creativity, or divergent thinking, than children in academically oriented classrooms (Hirsh-Pasek, Hyson, & Rescorla, 1990; Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990).

In two other studies on language development in child-initiated and academically focused programs, the developmentally appropriate, or child-initiated, programs were associated with better language outcomes. Progress reports from public-school preschool programs indicated that children in child-initiated classrooms had better verbal skills than children in academically oriented programs (Marcon, 1992). Children's receptive language was better in programs with higher quality literacy environments and when developmentally appropriate activities were more prevalent (Dunn, Beach, & Kontos, 1994).

Young children in developmentally appropriate programs also seemed more confident in their own cognitive skills. Children described their cognitive competence more positively when they attended child-initiated rather than academically oriented programs (Mantzicopoulos, Neuharth-Pritchett, & Morelock, 1994; Stipek et al., 1995).

When using the traditional measuring sticks of achievement tests and report card grades, it is difficult to say whether child-centered or didactic programs are superior. Similar to the state of affairs for social development, the available research is equivocal with regard to these assessments of cognitive development. The majority of the studies indicate that a didactic approach is *not* necessary to promote children's learning of academic skills. Supporting developmentally appropriate practice are studies by Sherman and Mueller (1996) and Marcon (1992). Sherman and Mueller (1996) observed better reading and mathematics achievement scores for children attending developmentally appropriate kindergarten through second grade. Preschool children in Marcon's (1992) study had more positive progress reports overall and specifically on math and science when they attended child-initiated classrooms. Mathematics achievement was similar for children in both types of classrooms, however. Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, and Rescorla (1990) found no differences in academic achievement as a function of the developmental appropriateness of the program preschool children attended.

Studies following children over time suggest there may be academic benefits to DAP in the long run. Children experiencing preschool programs rating high on developmental appropriateness do well academically in first grade (Frede & Barnett, 1992). In addition, children of low socioeconomic status attending appropriate kindergarten classrooms tend to have better reading achievement scores in first grade than children attending inappropriate classrooms (Burts et al., 1993). These are encouraging findings, given that the classroom children currently attend is also likely to influence their performance. The fact that differences between children in more- and less-appropriate classrooms are evident a year or more later suggests that children's learning environments during these early years are important.

What Have We Learned?

What have we learned from research on DAP? First, developmentally appropriate practices are not the norm in early childhood programs. Although teachers endorse this pedagogical method, they often struggle with implementation. Professional preparation designed to help teachers implement developmentally appropriate practice can be quite effective. We need to learn more about how to most effectively support teachers' implementation of developmentally appropriate practice.

Second, parents and teachers may not agree on the value of DAP. Helping parents understand the link between DAP and basic skill acquisition may prevent potential tensions between parents and teachers over instructional methods. The emotional costs of academically oriented classrooms, particularly for children from low-income, linguistically or culturally diverse groups, behoove us to make parents aware of the potential benefits of DAP.

Third, developmentally appropriate practices create a positive classroom climate conducive to children's healthy emotional development. Emotional development is an area often neglected when making programming decisions. This literature reminds us that children's emotions and their participation in classroom activities are vitally linked.

Fourth, we have only scratched the surface in understanding how developmentally appropriate practices influence children's social development. While developmentally appropriate practices enhance children's social skills in general, additional data are needed to determine how these practices affect other facets of socialization. Classroom practices and children's cognitive development interact in complex ways.

Conclusion

Taken together, the research favors DAP. In general, child-initiated environments were associated with higher levels of cognitive functioning. Coupling this information with the findings on stress and motivation provides a strong argument for developmentally appropriate practice, especially for low-income children—the very children whose parents may prefer academically oriented programs. While academic environments sometimes may result in higher levels of achievement, this achievement may come at emotional costs to the child. Given that similar cognitive advantages also occur in child-initiated environments, it would seem beneficial to explore ways to communicate more effectively how cognitive development is enhanced through developmentally appropriate practices.

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If an Adolescent Begins to Fail in School, What Can Parents and Teachers Do?

Anne S. Robertson

"How was school today?" Carol's mother asked tentatively. "Awful!" was the reply as Carol dropped her backpack in the middle of the kitchen floor and started stomping up the stairs to her bedroom. "It was the worst day ever. I don't know why you even bother to ask me!" Carol's mother sighed. She had expected that the teen years would be difficult, but she hoped that Carol would grow out of this difficult time soon.

Is This Simply a "Phase?"

Many teens experience a time when keeping up with school work is difficult. These periods may last several weeks and may include social problems as well as a slide in academic performance. Research suggests that problems are more likely to occur during a transitional year, such as moving from elementary to middle school, or middle school to high school (Baker & Sansone, 1990; Pantleo, 1992). Some adolescents are able to get through this time with minimal assistance from their parents or teachers. It may be enough for a parent to be available simply to listen and suggest coping strategies, provide a supportive home environment, and encourage the child's participation in school activities. However, when the difficulties last longer than a single grading period, or are linked to a long-term pattern of poor school performance or problematic behaviors, parents and teachers may need to intervene.

Identifying Adolescents Who Are At Risk for Failure

Some "at-risk" indicators, such as those listed here, may represent persistent problems from the early elementary school years for some children (Jacobsen & Hofmann, 1997; O'Sullivan, 1989). Other students may overcome early difficulties but begin to experience related problems during middle school or high school. For others, some of these indicators may become noticeable only in early adolescence. To intervene effectively, parents and teachers can be aware of some common indicators of an adolescent at risk for school failure, including:

- Attention problems as a young child—the student has a school history of attention issues or disruptive behavior.
- Multiple retentions in grade—the student has been retained one or more years.
- Poor grades—the student consistently performs at barely average or below average levels.
- Absenteeism—the student is absent five or more days per term.
- Lack of connection with the school—the student is not involved in sports, music, or other school-related extracurricular activities.
- Behavior problems—the student may be frequently disciplined or show a sudden change in school behavior, such as withdrawing from class discussions.
- Lack of confidence—the student believes that success is linked to native intelligence rather than hard work, and believes that his or her own ability is insufficient, and nothing can be done to change the situation.
- Limited goals for the future—the student seems unaware of career options available or how to attain those goals.

When more than one of these attributes characterizes an adolescent, the student will likely need assistance from both parents and teachers to complete his or her educational experience successfully. Girls, and students from culturally or linguistically diverse groups, may be especially at risk for academic failure if they exhibit these behaviors (Steinberg, 1996; Debold, 1995). Stepping back and letting these students "figure it out" or "take responsibility for their own learning" may lead to a deeper cycle of failure within the school environment.

Adolescents Want to Feel Connected to Their Family, School, Teachers, and Peers

In a recent survey, when students were asked to evaluate their transitional years, they indicated interest in connecting to their new school and requested more information about extracurricular activities, careers, class schedules, and study skills. Schools that develop programs that ease transitions for students and increase communication between schools may be able to reduce student failure rates (Baker & Sansone, 1990; Pantleo, 1992). Some schools make a special effort to keep in touch with their students. One example is the Young Adult Learning Academy (YALA), a successful alternative school for adolescent dropouts. According to YALA's director, Peter Klienbard, if a student at YALA appears to be having a problem or family emergency, teachers and counselors follow up quickly (Siegel, 1996, p. 50).

The Role of Parenting Style

Parenting style may have an impact on the child's school behavior. Many experts distinguish among permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991). These parenting styles are associated with different combinations of warmth, support, and limit-setting and supervision for children. The permissive style tends to emphasize warmth and neglect limit-setting and supervision; the authoritarian style tends to emphasize the latter and not the former; while the authoritative style is one in which parents offer warmth and support, and limit-setting and supervision. When the authoritative parenting style is used, the adolescent may be more likely to experience academic success (Glasgow et al., 1997, p. 521). Authoritative parents are warm and responsive but are also able to establish and enforce standards for their children's behavior, monitor conduct, and encourage communication. Authoritative parents make clear that they expect responsible behavior from their children and that they are available to support the child as needed (Glasgow et al., 1997, p. 508).

How Can Parents and Teachers Respond?

Parents often feel uncertain about how best to approach their adolescent or the school when their teen seems to be having difficulty. However, it is important to remember that adolescents need their parents not only to set appropriate expectations and boundaries, but also to advocate for them. Teachers can ease a parent's concerns by including the parent as part of the student's educational support team. When an adolescent is having difficulty, parents and teachers can assist by:

- making the time to listen to and try to understand the teen's fears or concerns;
- setting appropriate boundaries for behavior that are consistently enforced;
- encouraging the teen to participate in one or more school activities;
- attending school functions, sports, and plays;
- meeting as a team, including parents, teachers, and school counselor, asking how they can support the teen's learning environment, and sharing their expectations for the child's future;
- arranging tutoring or study group support for the teen from the school or the community through organizations such as the local YMCA or a local college or university;
- providing a supportive home and school environment that clearly values education;
- helping the child think about career options by arranging for visits to local companies and colleges, picking up information on careers and courses, and encouraging an internship or career-oriented part-time job;
- encouraging the teen to volunteer in the community or to participate in community groups such as the YMCA, Scouting, 4-H, religious organizations, or other service-oriented groups to provide an out-of-school support system;
- emphasizing at home and in school the importance of study skills, hard work, and follow-through.

Conclusion

Understanding the factors that may put an adolescent at risk for academic failure will help parents determine if their teen is in need of extra support. Above all, parents need to persevere. The teen years do pass, and most adolescents survive them, in spite of bumps along the way. Being aware of common problems can help parents know when it is important to reach out and ask for help before a "difficult time" develops into a more serious situation.

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When Retention Is Recommended, What Should Parents Do?

Anne S. Robertson

Each year, many teachers face the problem of where and how to place children who do not seem to fit into the rest of the class. In many school districts, retention, or having the child repeat a grade, is an option that is frequently considered for children who appear to lag behind. It is estimated that every year, 2.4 million students are retained in grade for a variety of reasons (Setencich, 1994, p. 4).

Characteristics of Children Who May Be Retained

A child may be considered for retention if he or she has poor academic skills, is small in stature or the youngest in the grade, has moved or been absent frequently, does poorly on a prescreening assessment, or has limited English-language skills. In addition, a retained child is more likely to be male and to have minority status, a high activity level, low socioeconomic status, and parents who are unwilling or unable to intercede for the child. Retention is also more commonly used in the primary grades (Sakowicz, 1996, pp. 17-18). In a few cases, the teacher may feel that the child is capable of moving forward, but the parent may prefer that the child be retained. Since most schools have vague policies regarding retention, the decision typically falls to the classroom teacher (Sakowicz, 1996, p. 7).

Effects of Retention

Research from the Gesell Institute suggests that children benefit from careful developmental assessment and placement in the early grades (Keirns, 1991). Some teachers and parents believe that appropriate placement encompasses retention and that certain children will benefit from the maturity gained from an extra year in the same grade. However, cumulative research on the effects of retention shows that the negative effects usually outweigh the positive effects. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, n.d.) notes the following among the negative effects:

- Most children do not "catch up" when held back.
- Although some retained students do better at first, these children often fall behind again in later grades.
- Students who are held back tend to get into trouble, dislike school, and feel badly about themselves more often than children who go on to the next grade.

In addition to the conclusions that NASP has drawn from the research, the weakened self-esteem that usually accompanies retention plays a role in how well the child may cope in the future. Research has shown that children view the thought of flunking a grade to be almost as stressful as the death of a parent or blindness (Sevener, 1990, p. 2). "Even more staggering is the fact that being held back twice makes dropping out of school a virtual certainty" (Setencich, 1994, p. 7).

Why Do Schools Retain Children?

In view of the larger body of research on retention, the continued use of retention is one of the clearest examples of poor communication between research and practice (Sakowicz, 1996, p. 16).

Professors Smith and Shepard at the University of Colorado found that teachers frequently exaggerated the perceived benefits of retention. They believed that retention in early grades prevented problems or the stigma of failure later on. But teachers lacked real feedback on how well students were doing as they moved through school (Smith & Shepard, 1987, p. 130). Also, the practice of retention gives the appearance of a school's being accountable about a problem and enforcing standards but may neglect the underlying cause of a student's failure (Sakowicz, 1996, p. 16).

There are also some philosophical differences among professional educators. Some teachers believe that children mature and develop school readiness along with physiological unfolding, while other teachers believe that any child of legal age is teachable if the program is adapted to fit that child's individual needs. In one study, the teachers who leaned toward physiological readiness also leaned towards retention, while the other teachers were more likely to change their teaching methods to meet the individual child's needs (Cooke & Stammer, 1985).

Options Other Than Retention

Another difficulty for a teacher or parent, as he or she assesses the possibilities for the child, is the basic dilemma of choosing from the options that are available in their school or community. It is important for parents and teachers to become aware of some of the alternatives to retention. These include:

- *Mixed-age classes.* In this environment, students learn at their own rate and advance to the next stage when they have mastered the required skills without the restriction of grade-level labeling.
- *Individualized instruction.* This method is tailored to the individual student's style of learning.
- *Tutoring.* Through individual attention, students are helped in difficult academic areas throughout the year.
- *Home assistance programs.* These programs provide parents with structured specific information about ways

to help their child academically with homework, sound study habits, or sound work habits.

- *Smaller class size.* Particularly in the primary years, small class size improves learning environments for all students.
- *Seeking alternative educational settings.* These may include summer school or after-school programs that are learning laboratories with lots of opportunities for projects and a "hands on" approach to learning.
- *Guidance counseling.* In an advisor/advisee type of relationship, an "at-risk" student may be identified earlier and given consistent support throughout his or her school career.
- *Delaying achievement testing that may lead to retention.* Achievement testing may be useful for identifying weak areas in the school curriculum and possibly areas where the child needs additional support; however, it should not be taken out of context of other information and become the deciding factor for grade placement for a child.

How Parents Can Respond

When parents are faced with retention as an option for their child, they can:

- Make an effort to understand why the teacher is suggesting retention. Parents can ask to see examples of their child's work compared to the work of other children of the same age. If the teacher is concerned about the child's maturity or behavior, parents can ask for specific examples of behavior that cause concern.
- Keep the teacher informed about the parents' knowledge of the child. If the child was within the normal ranges of early developmental benchmarks, parents can let the teacher know. How does the child's school behavior compare with his or her at-home behavior? Are there similarities or large differences?
- Be aware of the stresses that may be affecting the child and keep the teacher informed. For example, if the family has a new baby in the house, or has recently moved, these life changes can affect the child's behavior for a short period of time.
- At home, ask the child about homework and give him or her a quiet place to study.
- Be certain that the child eats nutritious meals, gets enough sleep, and stays healthy.
- Request assistance from other support staff in the school. The school psychologist, school counselor, or special education staff may be able to evaluate the child and suggest an alternative intervention.

However, if the parents and teachers believe that retention is the best option, the National Association of School Psychologists (1988) notes that retention is not as likely to be harmful when the student:

- lacks serious deficits in the year prior to retention;
- has positive self-esteem and good social skills;
- shows signs of difficulty in school because of lack of opportunity for instruction rather than lack of ability; or
- does not have serious social, emotional, or behavioral deficits.

If a child repeats a grade, parents should work with school personnel to be sure that their child has a significantly different experience during the retained year from the previous year and that the child is assessed and placed at the appropriate developmental level. Some options might include a classroom with a lower teacher–student ratio, a different curriculum, or a different approach to learning. It might also be beneficial to move the child to another school. If retention is chosen, then the extra year should not be just a repetition of the previous year, but it should be individualized in such a way that it contributes to the child's future success.

Conclusion

Early intervention or identification of specific difficulties can assist the child with specific skills he or she may need to be successful in his or her school career. Retention should be used rarely, and new approaches to curriculum development, school restructuring, and student instruction should become the focus of academic improvement (Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

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A Developmental Approach to Assessment of Young Children

Lilian G. Katz

For more than a decade, early childhood educators have been discussing issues of curriculum and teaching methods in terms of their developmental appropriateness. The concept of developmental appropriateness can also be extended to issues related to the assessment of children during the early years.

The Purposes of Assessment

Clarifying the main purpose for which young children are assessed can help determine what kinds of assessments would be most appropriate. Assessment of individual children might serve one of the following purposes:

- to determine progress on significant developmental achievements;
- to make placement or promotion decisions;
- to diagnose learning and teaching problems;
- to help in instruction and curriculum decisions;
- to serve as a basis for reporting to parents; and
- to assist a child with assessing his or her own progress.

Decisions regarding the purposes of assessment should begin with discussions among all the stakeholders—parents, educators, and other members of the community—as appropriate. The group may want to keep in mind that (1) plans, strategies, and assessment instruments are differentially suited for each of the potential purposes of assessment; (2) an overall assessment should include the four categories of educational goals: knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings (Katz, 1995); and (3) assessments made during children's informal work and play are most likely to minimize the many potential errors of various assessment strategies.

The Risks of Assessing Young Children

Young children are notoriously poor test-takers: perhaps because they are sometimes confused by being asked questions that they think the tester must already know the answers to! There is reason to suggest that the younger the child being evaluated, assessed, or tested, the more errors are made (Shepard, 1994; Ratcliff, 1995). If this principle is sound, then the younger the children, the greater the risk of assigning false labels to them. Another principle may also be appropriate: the longer children live with a label (a true or false one), the more difficult it may become to discard it.

All methods of assessment make errors: the errors made by formal tests are different from those made by informal or anecdotal records and documentation notes; the errors made by specific checklists of behavioral items are different from those made by holistic impressionistic assessments. Awareness of the potential errors of each evaluation or assessment strategy can help minimize errors in interpretation. It is a good idea to strive for a balance between global or holistic evaluation and detailed specific assessments of young children.

The Assessment of Young Children

As they plan assessments of young children's learning, parents and educators may want to:

Recognize the Limitations of Report Cards and Grades. For several reasons, report cards with letter grades or achievement scores are not appropriate for children at and below the third grade. First, before third grade, the differences in developmental timetables and other factors that contribute to performance are still too unstable, malleable, and varied to achieve reliability. By third grade, however, children's abilities and aptitudes are likely to have stabilized and can be assessed with at least minimal reliability. Second, there is little evidence that grades or scores listed on the report cards of young children contribute positively to those most in need of improvement. Third, while teachers need to know how well a young child is progressing on significant skills and knowledge, and to evaluate such progress, little is known about how parents use such information.

Assess Aspects of Children's Functioning That Have Real Meaning. The items and behaviors assessed should have demonstrable relationships to significant human functioning. For example, the child's knowledge of the names of shapes or of the calendar at age 4 or 5 has little or no practical significance or meaning beyond test performance itself. In addition to assessing young children's social competence, adults should include the assessment of individual children's progress in acquiring desirable dispositions, feelings, skills, and knowledge.

Documentation is a strategy for recording and presenting such assessments (see Katz & Chard, 1996).

Encourage Children to Assess Their Own Work. Preschoolers and children in the primary grades can be encouraged to assess their own work according to specific criteria such as the clarity, inclusiveness, interest level, comprehensiveness, or aesthetic qualities of the work. They can also be encouraged to consider the standards to be met on these criteria.

Encourage Children to Assess Their Own Progress. From kindergarten on, most children can be encouraged to assess the general progress of their own learning. During teacher–child or teacher–parent–child conferences, children can be encouraged to indicate what mastery and learning they want to focus on during a given period. From time to time, children can then be asked to judge their own progress, using three or four categories. For example, each child can be asked to discuss work she thinks she is making good progress on, what he thinks he needs to concentrate more on, what she wants help with, and other categories nominated by the child. Most children will be quite realistic and sensible when engaging in such self-evaluation. The teacher can help by expressing her own realistic evaluation in a serious and supportive way. In principle, unless children are consulted about their own views of their own progress, they cannot learn to assume some responsibility for it (Katz, 1995).

Involve Children in Evaluating the Class Community. Depending on their ages, children as a group can be encouraged to develop some criteria concerning what they want their classroom life to be like. These criteria are not simply lists of classroom rules. Rather they should be a thoughtful examination of what kind of community the class should be—for example, the extent to which it is a caring, cooperative group, respectful of individual differences; the extent to which it is a helpful community of scholars; and the extent to which it meets any other dimensions of classroom life the children and their teacher think are important.

Periodically, the teacher or a child can lead the group in a discussion concerning how well they are doing on these criteria as a class, and what additions or modifications of the criteria might be tried. Such discussions should be directed toward the development of positive and constructive suggestions.

Conclusion

Whenever a measurement is applied to a group of people of any age, especially a group that is diverse in background, experience, aptitude, development, culture, language, and interests, some will rank higher and some lower than others on any item assessed. All measures yield such differences, and it is thus statistically impossible for all those subjected to the same assessment to be above average! However, failure to evaluate and assess children's progress might mean that some children will be deprived of needed intervention with special services at a time when these services can do the most good. While educators cannot be accountable for all children being above average or for all children being first, they are accountable for applying all teaching strategies and efforts known to be effective and appropriate for the learning situation at hand. Assessment procedures should therefore indicate which of the strategies and resources available and judged appropriate have been employed to help each individual child.

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Bullying in Schools

Ron Banks

Bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can have negative consequences for the general school climate and for the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. Bullying can also have negative lifelong consequences—both for students who bully and for their victims. Although much of the formal research on bullying has taken place in the Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, and Japan, the problems associated with bullying have been noted and discussed wherever formal schooling environments exist.

Bullying is comprised of direct behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing that are initiated by one or more students against a victim. In addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be more indirect by causing a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion. While boys typically engage in direct bullying methods, girls who bully are more apt to utilize these more subtle indirect strategies, such as spreading rumors and enforcing social isolation (Ahmad & Smith, 1994; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Whether the bullying is direct or indirect, the key component of bullying is that the physical or psychological intimidation occurs repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993).

Extent of the Problem

Various reports and studies have established that approximately 15% of students are either bullied regularly or are initiators of bullying behavior (Olweus, 1993). Direct bullying seems to increase through the elementary years, peak in the middle school/junior high school years, and decline during the high school years. However, while direct physical assault seems to decrease with age, verbal abuse appears to remain constant. School size, racial composition, and school setting (rural, suburban, or urban) do not seem to be distinguishing factors in predicting the occurrence of bullying. Finally, boys engage in bullying behavior and are victims of bullies more frequently than girls (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Nolin, Davies, & Chandler, 1995; Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Characteristics of Bullies and Victims

Students who engage in bullying behaviors seem to have a need to feel powerful and in control. They appear to derive satisfaction from inflicting injury and suffering on others, seem to have little empathy for their victims, and often defend their actions by saying that their victims provoked them in some way. Studies indicate that bullies often come from homes where physical punishment is used, where the children are taught to strike back physically as a way to handle problems, and where parental involvement and warmth are frequently lacking. Students who regularly display bullying behaviors are generally defiant or oppositional toward adults, antisocial, and apt to break school rules. In contrast to prevailing myths, bullies appear to have little anxiety and to possess strong self-esteem. There is little evidence to support the contention that they victimize others because they feel bad about themselves (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993).

Students who are victims of bullying are typically anxious, insecure, cautious, and suffer from low self-esteem, rarely defending themselves or retaliating when confronted by students who bully them. They may lack social skills and friends, and they are often socially isolated. Victims tend to be close to their parents and may have parents who can be described as overprotective. The major defining physical characteristic of victims is that they tend to be physically weaker than their peers—other physical characteristics such as weight, dress, or wearing eyeglasses do not appear to be significant factors that can be correlated with victimization (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993).

Consequences of Bullying

As established by studies in Scandinavian countries, a strong correlation appears to exist between bullying other students during the school years and experiencing legal or criminal troubles as adults. In one study, 60% of those characterized as bullies in grades 6-9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24 (Olweus, 1993). Chronic bullies seem to maintain their behaviors into adulthood, negatively influencing their ability to develop and maintain positive relationships (Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1994).

Victims often fear school and consider school to be an unsafe and unhappy place. As many as 7% of America's eighth-graders stay home at least once a month because of bullies. The act of being bullied tends to increase some students' isolation because their peers do not want to lose status by associating with them or because they do not want to increase the risks of being bullied themselves. Being bullied leads to depression and low self-esteem, problems that can carry into adulthood (Olweus, 1993; Batsche & Knoff, 1994).

Perceptions of Bullying

Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler (1994) surveyed students in the Midwest and found that a clear majority felt that victims were at least partially responsible for bringing the bullying on themselves. Students surveyed tended to agree that bullying toughened a weak person, and some felt that bullying "taught" victims appropriate behavior. Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler (1995) found that students considered victims to be "weak," "nerds," and "afraid to fight back." However, 43% of the students in this study said that they try to help the victim, 33% said that they should help but do not, and only 24% said that bullying was none of their business.

Parents are often unaware of the bullying problem and talk about it with their children only to a limited extent (Olweus, 1993). Student surveys reveal that a low percentage of students seem to believe that adults will help. Students feel that adult intervention is infrequent and ineffective, and that telling adults will only bring more harassment from bullies. Students report that teachers seldom or never talk to their classes about bullying (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995). School personnel may view bullying as a harmless right of passage that is best ignored unless verbal and psychological intimidation crosses the line into physical assault or theft.

Intervention Programs

Bullying is a problem that occurs in the social environment as a whole. The bullies' aggression occurs in social contexts in which teachers and parents are generally unaware of the extent of the problem and other children are either reluctant to get involved or simply do not know how to help (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995). Given this situation, effective interventions must involve the entire school community rather than focus on the perpetrators and victims alone. Smith and Sharp (1994) emphasize the need to develop whole-school bullying policies, implement curricular measures, improve the schoolground environment, and empower students through conflict resolution, peer counseling, and assertiveness training. Olweus (1993) details an approach that involves interventions at the school, class, and individual levels. It includes the following components:

- An initial questionnaire can be distributed to students and adults. The questionnaire helps both adults and students become aware of the extent of the problem, helps to justify intervention efforts, and serves as a benchmark to measure the impact of improvements in school climate once other intervention components are in place.
- A parental awareness campaign can be conducted during parent-teacher conference days, through parent newsletters, and at PTA meetings. The goal is to increase parental awareness of the problem, point out the importance of parental involvement for program success, and encourage parental support of program goals. Questionnaire results are publicized.
- Teachers can work with students at the class level to develop class rules against bullying. Many programs engage students in a series of formal role-playing exercises and related assignments that can teach those students directly involved in bullying alternative methods of interaction. These programs can also show other students how they can assist victims and how everyone can work together to create a school climate where bullying is not tolerated (Sjostrom & Stein, 1996).
- Other components of anti-bullying programs include individualized interventions with the bullies and victims, the implementation of cooperative learning activities to reduce social isolation, and increasing adult supervision at key times (e.g., recess or lunch). Schools that have implemented Olweus's program have reported a 50% reduction in bullying.

Conclusion

Bullying is a serious problem that can dramatically affect the ability of students to progress academically and socially. A comprehensive intervention plan that involves all students, parents, and school staff is required to ensure that all students can learn in a safe and fear-free environment.

A Resource List on this topic is also available.

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The Debate over Spanking

Dawn Ramsburg

Spanking is one of the most controversial discipline methods. On one side of the debate are parents who believe it is all right to spank their children. On the other side are those who think that children should never be spanked. Somewhere in the middle are parents who believe that spanking should only be used in particular instances (e.g., when the child runs into the street). Part of the reason for the debate is that parents and experts often define spanking differently. To some, spanking means "slapping a child on the buttocks" (Straus, 1995, p. 5), while others consider spanking a generic term for any corporal punishment that does not cause an injury, such as slapping a child's hand for touching something forbidden or dangerous.

The purpose of this digest is to explore some of the reasons for spanking (using the general definition of any corporal punishment that does not cause an injury), to examine the effectiveness of spanking, and to suggest alternative discipline methods.

Reasons for Spanking

While many adults would argue that hitting people is wrong, spanking children continues to be used as an acceptable form of discipline because many parents think spanking will teach children not to do things that are forbidden, stop them quickly when they are being irritating, and encourage them to do what they should (Leach, 1996). Some parents also believe that the nonphysical forms of discipline, like time-out, do not work (Samalin & Whitney, 1995). Spanking is also a practice used more in some areas of the country than others (primarily in the southern United States) and in some cultures more than others (Flynn, 1996; Scarr, 1995).

Effectiveness of Spanking

While spanking may relieve a parent's frustration and stop misbehavior briefly, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (1995), researchers suggest that spanking may be the least effective discipline method. To test this hypothesis, researchers surveyed parents, with the assumption that if spanking worked, children who were spanked would learn to behave better over time so that they would need punishing less frequently (Leach, 1996). However, the results showed that families who start spanking before their children are a year old are just as likely to spank their 4-year-old children as often as families who do not start spanking until later. Thus, children appear not to be learning the lessons parents are trying to teach by spanking.

Spanking may be ineffective because it does not teach an alternative behavior (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995). In fact, children usually feel resentful, humiliated, and helpless after being spanked (Samalin & Whitney, 1995). The primary lesson they learn appears to be that they should try harder not to get caught.

Spanking also sends the wrong message to children (Samalin & Whitney, 1995). Spanking communicates that hitting is an acceptable way to solve problems, and that it is all right for a big person to strike a smaller one. In addition, when children are spanked, they may know that they have done something wrong, but in many cases, they are too young to understand the lesson. It is a very difficult message for any adult or child to understand: "I hurt you because I don't want you hurt."

Finally, when spanking is the primary discipline method used, it may have some potentially harmful long-term effects such as increasing the chances of misbehavior, aggression, violent or criminal behavior; impaired learning; and depression (Straus, 1995).

Alternatives to Spanking

One reason parents spank is that they are not aware of other effective strategies for changing children's undesirable behavior. To be effective, discipline that is appropriate for a child's age should be used. Ineffective methods are often based on unrealistic expectations about what children are capable of learning. Parents may find the following age-appropriate discipline suggestions useful alternatives to spanking.

Suggestions for Parents of Infants

Infants respond impulsively to many situations without a real understanding of their surroundings and abilities. Spanking will only cause fear and anxiety in children who do not yet understand such concepts as consequences and danger.

1. When there is danger, grasp an infant's hand instead of slapping (Leach, 1996).
2. When the infant is holding something that you do not want him to have, trade a toy instead of forcing the item from him (Leach, 1996). He will only hold on tighter if you try to take something away.
3. Baby-proof your living space so that there is nothing dangerous or breakable in reach (Ruben, 1996; Samalin & Whitney, 1995).
4. Leave the room if you feel your temper flaring, making sure that the baby is in a safe place like a playpen (Leach, 1996).

Suggestions for Parents of Toddlers

Disciplining toddlers requires a tremendous investment of time, energy, and patience, so it is important to find effective and appropriate techniques (Ruben, 1996). For example, it will not be effective to tell toddlers not to play with items that are dangerous, such as the stove, because they do not understand the consequences (Samalin & Whitney, 1995). Spanking, however, will not clarify the consequences either. Instead, children may learn from spanking that "I'm a bad person," rather than "I did a bad thing." You must use discipline methods consistently or your child will learn that you are not serious.

1. Make sure the environment is safe by removing any harmful or dangerous objects (Samalin & Whitney, 1995). It is natural for toddlers to want to explore their environment. Always supervise toddlers; it is unrealistic to expect a toddler to play safely without adult supervision for more than a few minutes (Leach, 1996).
2. Avoid direct clashes with toddlers, which will only make both of you angry and frustrated. Instead, try a diversion or distraction (Leach, 1996). Many problem situations can be eased with something funny or unexpected, such as tickling a mildly upset child (Ruben, 1996).
3. Use your size and strength to eliminate situations (Leach, 1996). Simply lift a child out of the bath or carry a child who refuses to walk.
4. If you start to deliver a slap, divert it to your knee or a table (Leach, 1996). This sound will interrupt the behavior without hitting the child.

Suggestions for Parents of Older Children

1. When you start to feel angry with your children, clap your hands loudly (Leach, 1996). The sound will interrupt their behavior.
2. If your child refuses to listen to you, crouch down to his level, grasp his arms firmly so he cannot avoid looking at you, and then talk calmly (Leach, 1996).
3. Since spanking does not occur in calm, rational moments (Samalin & Whitney, 1995), it is especially important to control your anger to prevent "losing it." You can walk away, hit a pillow, call a friend, or write a note. Once you have cooled down, you will probably feel less inclined to spank.
4. If you feel you must punish your children, make sure the punishment is logically related to the incident so that they can learn the lesson you want to teach (Leach, 1996). For example, if your child rides her bike onto a road that is forbidden, take the bike away for the afternoon. This punishment teaches her that roads can be dangerous, that you are concerned for her safety, and that you will enforce safety rules as long as they are needed. Taking away TV, dessert, or spanking will not teach bike safety.
5. Introduce the appropriate use of time-out (Ruben, 1996). Time-out used as a punishment is controversial. When used to allow a few minutes for a child—and a parent—to regain control of their emotions, it can be effective in stopping a cycle of inappropriate behavior.

Suggestions for All Ages

1. Support good behavior. Hugs and praise will go a long way (Ruben, 1996).
2. Try an ounce of prevention (Ruben, 1996). Effective discipline means announcing clear, simple family rules (the fewer, the better) at a time when children are calm and listening.
3. Try to understand the feelings behind your child's actions (Ruben, 1996). Ask older children why they are angry. When an infant cries, ask yourself: Does she want to be held? Is her diaper wet? Is she hungry?
4. Share your change of heart (Ruben, 1996). If you have spanked your children in the past, but have decided that you will stop, talk to your children about your decision. This lesson can be valuable for your whole family.

Conclusion

The question of whether or not parents should spank their children is not easy to answer. However, spanking is only one of the factors that needs to be considered in the overall discipline process. In deciding how to discipline their children, parents should first ask, "what do I want to accomplish?" If the answer is "teach my children how to make good choices on their own," spanking may not be an issue.

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Preventing and Resolving Parent-Teacher Differences

Lilian G. Katz, Amy Aidman, Debbie A. Reese, and Ann-Marie Clark

Parents and teachers share responsibility for creating a working relationship that fosters children's learning. This digest examines the cultural context for parent-teacher relationships, suggests some general strategies for creating a climate in which misunderstandings and disagreements between parents and teachers can be minimized through communication, and discusses some general principles for parents and teachers in dealing with misunderstandings or disagreements as they arise.

The Cultural Context for Parent-Teacher Relationships

It is important for teachers and parents to remember that they know the child in different contexts, and that each may be unaware of what the child is like in the other context. It is also useful to keep in mind generally that different people often have distinct but disparate perspectives on the same issue.

For many parents, a fundamental part of the parenting role is to be their child's strongest advocate with the teacher and the school (Katz, 1995). Other parents, however, may be reluctant to express their concerns because of cultural beliefs related to the authoritative position of the teacher. Others may have difficulty talking with teachers as a result of memories of their own school years, or they may be unsure of how to express their concerns to teachers. A few parents may fear that questions or criticism will put their child at a disadvantage in school.

Many parents may be surprised to learn that teachers, especially new teachers, are sometimes equally anxious about encounters with parents. Most teachers have received very little training in fostering parent-teacher relationships, but with the growing understanding of the importance of parent involvement, they may worry about doing everything they can to encourage parents to feel welcome (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

Avoiding Conflicts between Parents and Teachers through Open, Ongoing Communication

The foundation for good parent-teacher relationships is frequent and open communication. Both teachers and parents share the responsibility for creating such a foundation. There are several strategies teachers can use to establish a climate conducive to open communication. Teachers can:

Let parents know how and when they can contact the school and the teacher. As early in the school year as possible, teachers can explain that: (1) they can be reached at specific times or in specific ways; (2) they can be contacted directly as questions or concerns arise; and (3) they have given a lot of thought to their teaching philosophy, class rules, and expectations. In addition to personal interaction, teachers often use newsletters or letters home to provide this information to parents, perhaps including a phone number and, if available, an electronic mail address by which they can be contacted (Barnett, 1995). Some teachers encourage two-way communication by including in newsletters or letters home a short survey about children's interests or parents' hopes or expectations for the school year.

Practice an open-door, open-mind policy. Teachers can invite parents to visit the class at any time that is convenient to the parent. When they visit, parents can monitor their child's perceptions of a situation and see for themselves what the teacher is trying to achieve with his or her students.

Elicit expressions of parents' concerns and interests in preparation for parent-teacher conferences. Some schools organize parent-teacher meetings to discuss their goals early in the school year. On these occasions, teachers can ask parents to share their main concerns and goals for their child. Brief questionnaires and interest surveys also provide good bases for meaningful discussions in parent-teacher conferences (Nielsen & Finkelstein, 1993).

Involve parents in classroom activities. Teachers can let parents know how they can be helpful and solicit parents' assistance with specific activities. The more involved parents are in what goes on in the classroom, the more likely they are to understand the teacher's goals and practices.

Parents also have an important role to play in fostering open communication between themselves and teachers. They can:

Introduce themselves. At the beginning of the school year, parents can contact teachers and let them know when they can be reached most easily, daytime or evening, to discuss their child's classroom experience, and how they would prefer to be contacted (telephone, email, letter, etc.).

Be involved in classroom and school activities at whatever level work and family responsibilities allow. If parents cannot volunteer or go on field trips, they can let the teacher know that they are interested in helping in other ways—with a special display or some activity that can be done on an occasional weekend, for example. They can let the teacher know that they have skills that they would be willing to share even if they are not sure how they can be useful in the classroom. Or, they can let the teacher know that special

circumstances (an extremely ill parent, or an especially demanding job, for example) prevent them from being formally involved, but that they are always interested in how their child is doing and would welcome communications about their child on a regular basis, not just when there's a problem.

Initiate regular contact. Parents need not wait for the teacher to call them; they can contact the teacher at times the teacher has indicated are convenient.

When Parents and Teachers Disagree: Strategies for Teachers and Parents

On those inevitable occasions when parents and teachers disagree about curriculum, assignments, peer relationships, homework, or teaching approaches, a pattern of open communication can be invaluable for resolving differences (Willis, 1995). But dealing with direct disagreements also requires *respect* and *discretion* by both parents and teachers.

In times of disagreement, teachers should:

Know the school policy for addressing parent-teacher disagreements. It is a good idea for teachers to check school and district policies for handling conflicts or disagreements with parents and to follow the procedures outlined in the policies.

Use discretion about when and where children and their families are discussed. It is important to resist the frequent temptations to discuss individual children and their families in inappropriate public and social situations or to discuss particular children with the parents of other children. Confidentiality contributes to maintaining trust between parents and teachers.

Parents' discussions of disagreements with teachers need to be based on knowing the facts. Parents can:

Talk directly with the teacher about the problem. The best approach is to address complaints at first directly to the teacher, either in person or by telephone, and then to other school personnel in the order specified by school policy. Sometimes the teacher is unaware of the child's difficulty or perception of a situation. Sometimes a child misunderstands a teacher's intentions, or the teacher is unaware of the child's confusion about a rule or an assignment. It is important to check the facts directly with the teacher before drawing conclusions or allocating blame. Direct contact is necessary to define the problem accurately and to develop an agreement about how best to proceed.

Avoid criticizing teachers in front of children. Criticizing teachers and schools in front of children may confuse them. Even very young children can pick up disdain or frustration that parents express about their children's school experiences. In the case of the youngest children, it is not unusual for them to attribute heroic qualities to their teachers. Some even think that the teacher lives at school and thinks of no one but them! Eventually such naivete is outgrown, but overheard criticism is likely to be confusing in the early years and may put a child in a bind over divided loyalties. Besides causing confusion and conflict, criticizing the teacher in front of the child does nothing to address the problem. In the case of older children, such criticism may foster arrogance, defiance, and rudeness toward teachers. Children's respect for authority figures is generally a shared goal in most cultures (Katz, 1996).

Choose an appropriate time and place to discuss the disagreement. Parents should keep in mind that the end of the day, when both teachers and parents are tired, is probably not the best time for a discussion involving strong feelings. If an extended discussion is needed, make an appointment with the teacher.

As children grow older, they are generally aware when their parents are upset about the teacher or a school-related problem. As parents discuss these incidents with their children, they are modeling ways to express frustration with the problems of life in group settings. As children observe and then practice these skills, the coping skills become "tools" in a child's "psychological pocket" to be used in future life experiences.

Conclusion

Teachers and parents share responsibility for the education and socialization of children. Preventing and resolving the differences that may arise between parents, teachers, and children with constructive communication, respect, grace, and good humor can help make school a pleasant place.

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Grandparents as Parents: A Primer for Schools

Dianne Rothenberg

An increasing number of American grandparents are finding their later years different from what they expected. Instead of a quiet retirement, sweetened by delights of occasional visits with grandchildren, many grandparents have taken on the role of surrogate parents to their grandchildren. Reasons behind this trend involve a variety of family circumstances, including the death of one or both parents, parental abandonment, the high incidence of divorce, an increase in the number of never-married mothers (especially teen mothers), parental imprisonment, drug addiction, or mental illness. The AIDS epidemic also plays a role in this increasing shift of responsibility for child rearing. The Orphan Project of New York City (1995) estimates that 75,000 to 125,000 children will be orphaned by the year 2000 because their mothers have died of HIV/AIDS.

Recent legislative activity is also likely to contribute to an increase in the number of grandparent–grandchild families in the future. The amended September 1995 Social Security Act requires states to specify adult relatives as the first foster care option; the Kinship Care Act of 1996 (introduced by Senator Wyden of Oregon and recently referred to the Senate Committee on Finance) puts grandparents first in line as potential foster care parents and adoptive parents for grandchildren who, for safety reasons, have been removed from their parents' home.

In short, while grandparents have often raised their grandchildren in times of family crisis, the proportion of families in crisis situations is growing. A 40 percent increase in grandchildren living in their grandparents' homes, many without their parents, was reported between 1980 and 1990 (de Toledo & Brown, 1995). Families made up of grandparents and their grandchildren are just one of the diverse family structures with which schools are learning to work.

The Demographics of Grandparents as Parents

The National Center for Health Statistics (Saluter, 1996) reported that 3.735 million children under the age of 18 (5.4 percent) live in the home of their grandparent or grandparents, and that black children are more likely (13 percent) to live with a grandparent than white children (3.9 percent) or Hispanic children (5.7 percent). While nearly half the grandparent households with a grandchild include the child's mother, about a million families in the United States are made up of grandparents raising their grandchildren without one of the children's parents (Takas, 1995). Thus, about 1 in 20 children under 18 lives in a home headed by a grandparent without parents present.

Grandparents serving as surrogate parents represent all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Most families headed by grandparents live in an urban setting and have less than a high school education, and more such families live in the south (57 percent) than in all other areas of the United States combined (Turner, 1995).

How Schools Can Help

Schools can contribute significantly to helping grandparents cope with the stresses of parenting a second time around. As a basis for understanding and helping, school personnel may need to learn to recognize and accept strong feelings experienced by each member of the grandparent–parent–child triad. *Grandparents* (even those who find great satisfaction in raising their grandchildren) often feel disappointment mixed with anger, blame, guilt, and serious concern about family finances. *Parents* usually have ambivalent feelings of gratitude and resentment, as they grieve the loss of their child even if they recognize that the decision to remove the child from their care is in the child's best interest. Often, resentment deepens as estrangement widens. *Children* raised by grandparents may express feelings of abandonment, even though they are grateful to their grandparents for taking care of them (Saltzman & Pakan, 1996). Grandparent and grandchild interactions with noncustodial parents can be supportive or damaging to all the parties involved.

School Strategies Intended To Help Grandparents

Schools can use many strategies to support grandparents who are working to raise and educate their grandchildren. Many schools may find the following list of suggestions useful.

Examine school policies on enrollment. Existing policies may need revision to accommodate the realities of children living with their grandparents. For example, in some districts, once the grandparent has informal authority from the parent or legal authority, he or she is able to enroll the child in school, review the child's records, and make any requests or decisions about the child's education (American Association of Retired Persons [AARP], 1993). In other districts, formal guardianship is required for anyone other than a parent to make school decisions on behalf of the child.

Have helpful information on hand for grandparents acting as parents. School counselors may want to write to the organizations in the Resource List accompanying this digest for more information on parenting the second time around, and they may want to share it with teachers and grandparents acting as parents. They may want to check

with local social service agencies to find out about support groups and "reparenting" or "grandparenting" classes for grandparents raising a second family. Such services may help reduce the isolation that is commonly cited as a major problem for grandparents raising their grandchildren (de Toledo & Brown, 1995).

Keep in mind that short-term "respite care" for young and school-age children often tops the "wish list" of grandparent caregivers (Turner, 1995). If they do not already routinely do so, schools can prepare information in advance on before- and after-school programs, on lunch and breakfast programs, and on Head Start or other preschool programs for *all* families.

Be sure that school policy supports appropriate referrals for educational, health, and social services, as needed. Grandparents may not be aware of services available to help their grandchild academically or to help the child deal with emotional and psychological problems. Eligibility for such services may be in question in some situations, yet many grandparent–grandchild families are particularly in need of this kind of assistance (AARP, 1993).

Keep in mind that school may be a much different place from the schools that grandparents remember. Schools might consider scheduling extra time for grandparent–teacher conferences, letting grandparents know how to reach the teacher not only when there is a problem but at any time, and encouraging grandparents to volunteer at school to gain a sense of current school practices.

Use "family-friendly" strategies to encourage surrogate parents to take an active role in their children's education. These strategies include using inclusive language on home–school communications. Schools might want to stress to teachers the importance of understanding how the child views his or her primary caregiver. When the teacher is sending home important notices, the teacher needs to know whether it is "Grandmommy" or "Poppa" who will need to read, sign, and return the forms. The child and his or her classmates need to hear the teacher's accurate acknowledgment of this important relationship.

School Strategies Intended To Help Grandchildren

Schools can also help children cope with the stresses of adjusting to their living arrangements. The strategies listed here particularly affect the children.

Anticipate transitional or adjustment difficulties and act to minimize them. If a grandchild has only recently come into the grandparents' home, he or she may need time to adjust to a new routine, including expectations that he or she will attend school regularly and complete schoolwork.

Look for children's strengths and build on them. As many as two-thirds of children who have grown up in difficult circumstances have within them the resilience to grow up to lead healthy, productive lives (Benard, 1991). With support and sensitivity, these children can often meet teachers' expectations.

Place children living with grandparents with the most stable and experienced teachers. Whether because of long-term family instability or recent sudden trauma, children living with their grandparents may not only need extra attention during the school year but also the classroom stability that an experienced teacher can provide.

Try not to single out children because of their family status in front of peers or other teachers. Shame and the feeling of being different from their peers, however unjustified, can contribute to a difficult school adjustment for these children.

Conclusion

Children from families headed by grandparents constitute a growing proportion of students in schools, and their numbers can be expected to continue to increase. Schools that recognize and support these nontraditional families will be able to provide better service to their communities.

See the *Grandparents as Parents Resource List* of related publications and organizations.

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Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades

Barry Rutherford and Shelley H. Billig

A research project that was focused on family and community involvement in comprehensive districtwide programs, school restructuring, and adult and child learning programs in the middle grades provided an opportunity to examine nine local sites that presented unique challenges for family and community involvement. Two central questions were explored at all sites. First, how do schools and districts involve families and the community as partners in education reform? Second, how do schools and districts create partnerships that acknowledge the roles of the family, school, and community in the growth of the child, and how do these systems interact? By synthesizing findings across all nine sites, researchers developed a set of eight "lessons" which enrich our understanding of the critical and complex nature of school-family partnerships in the middle grades.

Lesson 1: *The stakes are high and immediate for everyone in the middle grades.* In the middle grades, students make personal and educational decisions with serious consequences. They wrestle with issues of authority, independence, changing family relationships, and increased visibility in the community, all of which require that students practice social skills for community participation. These challenges, coupled with the perception that the middle-grade years are a watershed time for young adolescents, create a compelling case for the critical importance of the middle grades.

Implications. Schools can create programs that respond to the unique needs of middle-grade students and their families. Communities can publicize positive reports about and provide positive interventions for middle-grade students. Families can engage middle-grade children in active decision making. In Fort Worth, for example, the Vital Link program places sixth-graders in more than 140 businesses for several hours each morning during a one-week internship. The goal is to understand career opportunities in a variety of fields through hands-on experience.

Lesson 2: *Challenges can become opportunities for parent and family involvement.* In addition to coping with the physical and emotional changes of adolescence, middle-grade students and their families must also deal with changes in the way schools operate. Communication patterns change; the student's day is fragmented, with more teachers, subjects, and extracurricular choices.

Implications. Schools can create structures that decrease the fragmentation of the school day; provide parents with strategies to support the academic success of their middle-grade students; and make available specific educational opportunities geared to the special interests of middle-grade families. Families can serve as advocates and resources for middle-grade children. Restructuring in Shelburne, Vermont, has focused on organizing elementary and middle grades into a nine-year system, divided into three-year "communities," making it more likely that students will learn necessary social skills and parents will find middle school welcoming.

Lesson 3: *Relationships are the essence of middle-grade family and community involvement.* Schools and communities are ideal contexts for developing and fostering strong relationships with the families of middle-grade students. One-on-one communication between families and teachers, the addition of school personnel to deal with family issues, and community contact with students in their roles as consumers and workers help to build support for middle-grade schools.

Implications. Schools can encourage direct contact between middle-grade families and teachers and can create staffing patterns that support these relationships. Communities can take advantage of middle-school students' relationships with local businesses (as workers and consumers) to make supportive community connections. Families can be encouraged to build personal relationships with school staff.

Lesson 4: *Responsibility and decision making are shared by a broad array of players, including the child.* Just as adolescents' roles change during the middle grades, so do their responsibilities and decision-making strategies. School, home, and community are all places where middle-graders learn and are actively involved in positive or negative ways. Teachers, counselors, social service personnel, business-people, families, and students themselves can and should share responsibility and decision making with regards to the curriculum and the delivery of instruction. The challenge for middle-grade schools comes in coordinating information and efforts across a broad range of stakeholders.

Implications. Schools need to include middle-grade families, teachers, and students in decisions about curriculum and instruction; involve families and students in conferences about course-work and individual progress; and coordinate information from the school to ensure smooth communications. Families need to understand school policies and expectations to act as advocates and supporters of middle-grade students.

Lesson 5: *Sustained parent, family, and community involvement depend on active advocacy by leaders.* Leadership in the school and community plays a key role in fostering parent, family, and community involvement. Leaders set the tone for involvement, make it a priority, and provide the context that enables school personnel, families, community members, and businesspeople to maintain an active role in middle-grades education.

Implications. Schools need to look for a whole array of community connections; use creative approaches in defining leadership, designing programs, and solving problems; and provide a climate for success that includes making available fiscal and human resources. Communities should take an active role in making connections with schools. Families can represent the interests of middle-grade children, and they can use community connections to advocate for the school. The principal at Barret Traditional Middle School in Louisville, Kentucky, for example, views his leadership as going beyond the boundaries of the school and into the community.

Lesson 6: *A system of supports for front-line workers is critical to parent and family involvement.* Frontline workers—teachers and other school personnel—are key players in family involvement. Through these frontline workers families are connected to the services provided by the school or community. They need professional development, the ability and authority to make decisions about services to address family needs, structures that provide the workers themselves with social and emotional support, and other resources.

Implications. Schools can provide professional development on promising practices and family involvement programs; empower frontline workers to make key decisions that connect middle-grade families with needed services; create structures that provide social and emotional support for frontline workers; and design support systems that outline expectations and give frontline workers resources for family involvement. The Kentucky Education Reform Act mandates "Youth Service Centers" in middle schools serving economically disadvantaged students. A wide range of services are available through local agencies there.

Lesson 7: *Families need connections to the curriculum.* In the middle grades, multiple teachers, the increasing complexity of course content, and students' growing need for autonomy tend to weaken the tie between parents and the curriculum that existed in elementary school. Families may find that the ways in which they are involved will undergo fundamental change during the middle-grade years.

Implications. Schools need to engage families in meaningful home learning tasks; demonstrate ways for families to work with middle-grade students; and use the content and characteristics of middle-school learning experiences as starting points for family connections. Families need to create an environment that values and promotes achievement and communicate with the school and teachers about what is being taught and their child's progress. Community District 3 in New York City provides families with home learning "kits" that reinforce instruction; Parent Center staff in Natchez, Mississippi, demonstrate materials and activities that families can use to work with their children at home.

Lesson 8: *Schools need connections to the community.* The geographic areas served by a school broadens in the middle grades. Middle school is often located at a greater distance from a student's "home" community; school attendance areas often draw students from several different communities. In defining their own "community," schools must recognize the unique strengths of diverse, multiethnic, and multiracial school populations in both rural and urban settings. They must implement strategies to provide multiple opportunities for the larger community to be involved in the middle grades.

Implications. Schools need to acknowledge the unique characteristics of the school community; design programs to build on its strengths; seek opportunities to invite the community to participate in school activities; and use a variety of strategies to communicate directly with the community. Communities must take an active role in school decision making. And families must find a variety of ways to participate and adopt new roles for participation. Project REACH at Beck Middle School in Georgetown, South Carolina, uses community members as instructional resources.

Conclusion

These eight lessons and accompanying examples illustrate some of the ways in which districts and middle-grade schools engage families and the community. These partnerships go beyond information exchange to foster school change and the creation of relationships that contribute to student success.

Adapted from: Rutherford, Barry, and Shelley H. Billig. (1995). Eight Lessons of Parent, Family and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(1, Sept.), 64-68. Adapted with permission of *Phi Delta Kappan*.

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Supporting Girls in Early Adolescence

Dianne Rothenberg

Results of national studies suggest that for girls, the middle grades can be a time of significant decline in self-esteem and academic achievement (AAUW, 1991; Backes, 1994). The analysis of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development supports the finding that many girls seem to think well of themselves in the primary grades but suffer a severe decline in self-confidence and acceptance of body image by the age of 12 (Orenstein, 1994).

Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

The development of a positive self-image is critical in the middle grades. Many educators report a general decline in school performance among girls as they enter adolescence (Orenstein, 1994). As a group, for example, girls exhibit a general decline in science achievement not observed for boys, and this gender gap may be increasing (Backes, 1994). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that for 9- and 13-year-olds, gender differences in science achievement increased between 1978 and 1986, with females' academic performance declining (Mullis & Jenkins, 1988). The relationship between a decline in self-concept and a decline in achievement indicates that identifying the special needs of female students at school and at home should be a high priority for parents and teachers.

Reasons for the decline in self-esteem and the accompanying decline in academic achievement are not clearly indicated by research, but it is likely that multiple factors are involved. The AAUW study found evidence that boys receive preferential treatment in school from teachers. The researchers found that boys ask more questions, are given more detailed and constructive criticism of their work, and are treated more tolerantly than girls during outbursts of temper or resistance (AAUW, 1991; Orenstein, 1994).

Out-of-school factors probably also play a role: some observers suggest that, as they grow older, girls' observations of women's roles in society contribute to their changing opinions about what is expected of girls. If girls observe that women hold positions of less status than men in society, it may lead girls to infer that their role is less important than that of boys or that they are inferior to boys (Debold, 1995).

A third factor relates to cultural differences in sex role socialization, which are greater in some cultures than others. Parents' actions play a central role in girls' sex role socialization, and parents' choices and attitudes about toys, clothing, activities, and playmates can shape a girl's sense of herself.

It appears that ethnicity, race, and class are differentiating factors in girls' interpretation of in-school and out-of-school experiences (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). For example, the AAUW (1991) study suggests that many African American and Latina girls demonstrate evidence of a decline of self-esteem in early adolescence by becoming disaffected with schooling in general. The study by Orenstein (1994) found that in 1991, Latinas left school at a greater rate than any other group.

Self-Image and Body Image

Researchers have observed other consequences associated with a general loss of self-esteem in preadolescent girls in addition to a decline in actual academic achievement. They have found, for example, that, "compared to boys, adolescent girls experience greater stress, are twice as likely to be depressed, and attempt suicide four or five times as often (although boys are more likely to be successful)" (Debold, 1995, p. 23). Girls' depression has been found to be linked to negative feelings about their bodies and appearance. Poor body image and disordered eating—including obesity—is much more prevalent in adolescent girls than boys (Orenstein, 1994). While it is difficult to find specific causes for these difficulties, gender stereotypes in television, movies, books, and the toy and fashion industries pose obvious challenges to girls' healthy psychological development (Smutny, 1995).

Researchers (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; McDonald and Rogers, 1995) attribute self-image problems to the "perfect girl" or "nice girl" syndrome. According to these researchers, around the age of 10, many middle-class girls have internalized the messages and expectations they have received into the ideal of the "perfect girl" who is pretty, kind, and obedient, and never has bad thoughts or feelings. They speculate that in trying to keep up with the impossible demands of this unrealistic view of perfect feminine behavior, girls may suppress some of their ability to express anger or to assert themselves, and they may

begin to judge themselves through others' eyes and to question their own worth. In preadolescence, girls are also struggling to reconcile their conflicting knowledge of equality and justice, and the demands for compliance placed on them at home and in school (Debold, 1995).

Support Strategies for Preadolescent Girls

Parents, teachers, and administrators can provide support and encouragement to preadolescent girls in several ways. According to Smutny (1995), parents can:

• Begin early to nurture freedom from stereotyped expectations. Provide toys that reflect the full range of children's play and allow girls to watch TV programs and movies that provide a balanced mix of stories with men and women characters in positive traditional and nontraditional roles;

• Encourage boys' development of nurturing and caring attributes;

• Take daughters into the workplace in their field of interest, and explain how the work contributes to the good of the community;

• Inquire regularly about their daughters' participation in school and confer with teachers about their strengths;

• Listen to their daughters' questions, complaints, and comments about peers, siblings, and adults, and make an effort to read between the lines to discover where real problems, if any, may lie;

• Be aware that girls receive conflicting messages about their worth and place in our culture from schools, television, and the movies. Counter these messages by engaging in critical discussions of these ideas and by reading and viewing age-appropriate stories and biographies with strong female characters.

Debold (1995) and Backes (1994) suggest teachers can:

• Find ways to develop gender-fair curricula for middle schools. Consider separate inservice time for male and female teachers to consider questions such as: How can I look from a girl's perspective at what and how I teach? What do I show girls through my actions in the classroom?

• Encourage girls to enroll and participate in all academic courses, especially science and math, and see that their contributions are valued in classroom discourse.

• Deal directly and age-appropriately with issues of power, gender, race, and politics, taking care to include critical perspectives on these issues in the school curriculum.

They also suggest that administrators can:

• Develop, support, and enforce policies against gender-related harassment toward girls by students and teachers.

• Take the lead in being sure that teachers and school programs offer equal opportunities to boys and girls in classrooms and extracurricular activities.

• As part of school improvement efforts, acknowledge the need to include a focus on the improvement of self-concept and achievement of girls.

Conclusion

At home and in school, adults can shape the lessons taught to girls about themselves, their place in school, and their future in society. Debold (1995) states, "Girls need the support of adults to resist pressures to conform to outdated stereotypes that can limit their expectations and achievement." By assuring that girls' contributions are valued in and out of the classroom, and by creating an environment in which girls can express their opinions, make mistakes, and demonstrate their interest in learning without fear of harassment or of being ignored, parents, teachers, and administrators can make a positive contribution to the development of adolescent and preadolescent girls.

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Fostering Resilience in Children

Bonnie Benard

This digest summarizes a growing body of international, cross-cultural, longitudinal studies that provide scientific evidence that many youth—even those with multiple and severe risks in their lives—can develop into "confident, competent, and caring adults" (Werner & Smith, 1992); and discusses the critical role schools can play in this process.

The Nature of Resilience

Some longitudinal studies, several of which follow individuals over the course of a lifespan, have consistently documented that between half and two-thirds of children growing up in families with mentally ill, alcoholic, abusive, or criminally involved parents or in poverty-stricken or war-torn communities do overcome the odds and turn a life trajectory of risk into one that manifests "resilience," the term used to describe a set of qualities that foster a process of successful adaptation and transformation despite risk and adversity. Resilience research validates prior research and theory in human development that has clearly established the biological imperative for growth and development that exists in the human organism and that unfolds naturally in the presence of certain environmental characteristics. We are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.

Social competence includes qualities such as responsiveness, especially the ability to elicit positive responses from others; flexibility, including the ability to move between different cultures; empathy; communication skills; and a sense of humor. *Problem-solving skills* encompass the ability to plan; to be resourceful in seeking help from others; and to think critically, creatively, and reflectively. In the development of a *critical consciousness,* a reflective awareness of the structures of oppression (be it from an alcoholic parent, an insensitive school, or a racist society) and creating strategies for overcoming them has been key.

Autonomy is having a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and to exert some control over one's environment, including a sense of task mastery, internal locus of control, and self-efficacy. The development of resistance (refusing to accept negative messages about oneself) and of detachment (distancing oneself from dysfunction) serves as a powerful protector of autonomy. Lastly, resilience is manifested in having a *sense of purpose* and a belief in a bright future, including goal direction, educational aspirations, achievement motivation, persistence, hopefulness, optimism, and spiritual connectedness.

From this research on resilience, from the literature on school effectiveness (Comer, 1984; Edmonds, 1986; Rutter et al., 1979), and from a rich body of ethnographic studies in which we hear the voices of youth, families, and teachers explaining their successes and failures (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Weis & Fine, 1993), a clear picture emerges of those characteristics of the family, school, and community environments that may alter or even reverse expected negative outcomes and enable individuals to circumvent life stressors and manifest resilience despite risk. These "protective factors" or "protective processes" can be grouped into three major categories: caring and supportive relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

Caring Relationships

The presence of at least one caring person—someone who conveys an attitude of compassion, who understands that no matter how awful a child's behavior, the child is doing the best he or she can given his or her experience—provides support for healthy development and learning. Werner and Smith's (1989) study, covering more than 40 years, found that, among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of resilient children, outside of the family circle, was a favorite teacher who was not just an instructor for academic skills for the youngsters but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification. Furthermore, as the research of Noddings (1988) has articulated, a caring relationship with a teacher gives youth the motivation for wanting to succeed: "At a time when the traditional structures of caring have deteriorated, schools must become places where teachers and students live together, talk with each other, take delight in each other's company....It is obvious that children will work harder and do things...for people they love and trust." Even beyond the teacher-student relationship, creating a schoolwide ethos of caring creates the opportunities for caring student-to-student, teacher-to-teacher, and teacher-to-parent relationships. An ethic of caring is obviously not a "program" or "strategy" per se, but rather a way of being in the world, a way of relating to youth, their families, and each other that conveys compassion, understanding, respect, and interest. It is also the wellspring from which flow the two other protective factors.

High Expectations

Research has indicated that schools that establish high expectations for all youth—and give them the support necessary to achieve them—have high rates of academic

success. They also have lower rates of problem behaviors such as dropping out, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and delinquency than other schools (Rutter et al., 1979). The conveying of positive and high expectations in a classroom and school occurs at several levels. The most obvious and powerful is at the relationship level in which the teacher and other school staff communicate the message that the student has everything he or she needs to be successful. As Tracy Kidder (1990) writes, "For children who are used to thinking of themselves as stupid or not worth talking to...a good teacher can provide an astonishing revelation. A good teacher can give a child at least a chance to feel, 'She thinks I'm worth something; maybe I am'." Through relationships that convey high expectations, students learn to believe in themselves and in their futures, developing the critical resilience traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy, and optimism.

Schools also communicate expectations in the way they are structured and organized. The curriculum that supports resilience respects the way humans learn. Such a curriculum is thematic, experiential, challenging, comprehensive, and inclusive of multiple perspectives—especially those of silenced groups. Instruction that supports resilience focuses on a broad range of learning styles; builds from perceptions of student strengths, interests, and experience; and is participatory and facilitative, creating ongoing opportunities for self-reflection, critical inquiry, problem solving, and dialogue. Grouping practices that support resilience promote heterogeneity and inclusion, cooperation, shared responsibility, and a sense of belonging. And, lastly, evaluation that supports resilience focuses on multiple intelligences, utilizes authentic assessments, and fosters self-reflection.

Opportunities for Participation

Providing youth with opportunities for meaningful involvement and responsibility within the school is a natural outcome in schools that have high expectations. Participation, like caring and respect, is a fundamental human need. Several educational reformers believe that when schools ignore these basic needs of both students and teachers, schools become alienating places (Sarason, 1990). On the other hand, certain practices provide youth with opportunities to give their gifts back to the school community and do indeed foster all the traits of resilience. These practices include asking questions that encourage critical thinking and dialogue (especially around current social issues), making learning more hands-on, involving students in curriculum planning, using participatory evaluation strategies, letting students create the governing rules of the classroom, and employing cooperative approaches (such as cooperative learning, peer helping, cross-age mentoring, and community service).

Conclusion

Along with other educational research, research on resilience gives educators a blueprint for creating schools where all students can thrive socially and academically. Research suggests that when schools are places where the basic human needs for support, respect, and belonging are met, motivation for learning is fostered. Reciprocal caring, respectful, and participatory relationships are the critical determining factors in whether a student learns; whether parents become and stay involved in the school; whether a program or strategy is effective; whether an educational change is sustained; and, ultimately, whether a youth feels he or she has a place in this society. When a school redefines its culture by building a vision and commitment on the part of the whole school community that is based on these three critical factors of resilience, it has the power to serve as a "protective shield" for all students and a beacon of light for youth from troubled homes and impoverished communities.

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Assessing the Development of Preschoolers

Lilian G. Katz

It is only natural for parents to wonder occasionally if the development of their preschooler is going well. Questions such as, Is my child doing what he or she is supposed to at this age? and, Do all four-year-olds behave this way in the same situations? reflect a natural desire to be sure the child is progressing normally. Over the years, psychologists have developed many normative scales to indicate how an individual child compares with others of a given age in similar populations.

This digest focuses on the question of individual growth, namely, Is the individual child's development going so well that he or she can be described as thriving? As parents look at their own young children's behavior and achievements on the categories outlined below, they can address the question, What aspects of my child's development need special encouragement, support, or intervention right now?

Categories of Behavior To Assess

In the course of development, ups and downs are inevitable even for children whose physical and mental endowments are normal. Occasionally children require intervention to get them successfully through a "down" period. Parents can observe behaviors in the eleven categories listed below during periods when they suspect a bit of a downturn. Keep in mind that difficulties in any single category are no cause for alarm. Indeed, difficulties in several categories do not imply irreversible problems; rather, they help us notice those periods when the child's life situation, for many possible reasons, is a bit out of adjustment with his or her emerging needs.

For three-year-olds, a look at their behavior on the following criteria for a period of about three weeks is desirable. For four-year-olds, four weeks should give a reliable picture of the quality of the child's life. At five years, add another week, and so forth. Be careful not to judge their permanent behavior based on one day's observation! All of us—children and adults—have the occasional really bad day!

1. Sleeping Habits

Does the child usually fall asleep easily and wake up rested, ready to get on with life? Occasional restless nights, nightmares, or grouchy mornings are all right. The average pattern of deep sleep resulting in morning eagerness is a good sign that the child experiences life as satisfying. Frequent insomnia or morning grouchiness for three or four weeks may indicate that a child is trying to cope with excessive stress, and a modification in life style might be tried.

2. Eating Habits

Does the child usually eat with appetite? Occasional skipping of meals or refusal of food is to be expected. Sometimes a child is too busy with absorbing activities to bother with food at mealtimes. Also, remember that children may eat a lot at one meal and hardly anything at the next. However, a preschooler who for several weeks eats as though famine were around the corner or who constantly fusses about the menu or picks at the food may be asking for comfort.

3. Toilet Habits

Does the child have, on the average over several weeks, bowel and bladder control, especially during the day? Occasional "accidents" are all right, particularly under special circumstances, such as excessive intake of liquids, intestinal upset, or an intense concentration with ongoing activity so that the child is too absorbed to attend to such "irrelevancies." Children who sleep well often take longer to stay continent at night.

4. Range of Emotions

Does the child show the capacity for a range of emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, grief, enthusiasm, excitement, frustration, love, and affection? These need not be exhibited all in one day, of course, but should be seen over several weeks. A child whose emotions don't vary—who is always angry or sour or enthusiastic—may be in trouble. Note that expressions of sadness are not necessarily problematical; in appropriate situations, they can indicate the ability to really care about others.

5. Friendship

Can the child initiate and maintain satisfying relationships with one or more peers? A child who often plays alone is not experiencing a developmental problem as long as the cause is not insufficient social competence. A child who is fearful of peers or who frequently claims superiority over others may be seeking reassurance or may doubt his or her ability to meet parents' lofty expectations.

6. Variations in Play

Does the child's play vary, and does the child add elements to the play, even though the play is with the same toys or materials? A child who ritualistically and repetitively goes through the same sequence of play, with the same

elements and in the same way, may be emotionally "stuck in neutral," indicating perhaps that the child has insufficient inner security to "play with the environment."

7. Responses to Authority

Does the child usually accept adult authority? Occasional resistance, self-assertion, protest, and objections, when followed by ultimate yielding to the adult, indicate healthy socialization processes. Unfailing acceptance of adult demands and restrictions without a peep suggest excessive anxiety.

8. Curiosity

Does the child occasionally exhibit curiosity, adventure, and even mischief? A child who never pries or snoops where forbidden may not be pushing against perceived boundaries enough for healthy development or may fear punishment excessively. On the other hand, frequent manifestation of these behaviors may indicate a search for boundaries.

9. Interest

Does the child occasionally become involved, absorbed, and interested in something outside of him- or herself? The emphasis here is on sustained involvement in "activities" rather than in "passivities" such as television. A preschooler who cannot become absorbed in an activity or who rarely stays with a project until completion may need help.

10. Spontaneous Affection

Does the child express spontaneous affection for one or more of those responsible for his or her care? Note that this criterion refers to spontaneous declarations of love, not such displays as the required goodnight kiss. Also, demonstrations of affection vary among families and cultures and must be taken into account on this criterion. Nevertheless, in culturally appropriate ways, a child who is thriving is likely occasionally to express affection toward caretakers and deep pleasure in being with them. Excessive expressions of this kind, however, may signal doubts about the feelings caretakers have toward the child.

11. Enjoyment of the "Good Things of Life"

Does the child enjoy the "good things of life?" For young children, playing with others; going to picnics, parties, festivals, and new places; and exploring new toys are parts of the good life. If a child has a problem such as shyness, fear of dogs, or food dislikes, but the problem is not so severe that it prevents him or her from enjoying childhood pleasures, then assume that the child will outgrow the problem. If, however, problems do prevent enjoyment of the good things of childhood, help is called for.

Suggestions for Intervention

The first three of these eleven criteria of sound development—sleeping, eating, and toilet habits—are particularly sensitive indicators of the child's well-being because only the child has control of them. The other criteria are more culture-bound and situationally determined. When the pattern of a child's behavior on about half of the criteria seems less than optimum over a period of about a month, some remedial action should be taken.

While each individual case will require its own special intervention, some general approaches are worth trying right away. For example, no matter what the underlying cause, almost all young children respond well to spending time alone with an adult who is important to them. The important adult may be a parent, relative, caregiver, or anyone else with whom the child has a significant relationship. The time can be spent walking around the block, helping to tidy up a closet, gardening, baking a cake, or doing anything else the child really enjoys. The activity should be simple; it need not be an exotic trip to a faraway place. The main point is having someone special all to oneself. A few minutes a day for a few weeks will invariably help alleviate whatever stresses the child has encountered. Once the level of stress is reduced and the child is more relaxed, he or she may then become more responsive to a parent's guidance and suggestions about how to cope with the problem at hand.

In some cases a child's development can get back on track when his or her daily routines are simplified. Many preschoolers have a hard time coping with frequent, rapid, changes in environments within a day or week in which they are expected to be responsive and cooperative, to exercise self-control, and to be self-sufficient. For such children, reducing the number and rate of changes can go a long way to helping them "get back on the right foot."

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The Risks of Rewards

Alfie Kohn

Many educators are acutely aware that punishment and threats are counterproductive. Making children suffer in order to alter their future behavior can often elicit temporary compliance, but this strategy is unlikely to help children become ethical, compassionate decision makers. Punishment, even if referred to euphemistically as "consequences," tends to generate anger, defiance, and a desire for revenge. Moreover, it models the use of power rather than reason and ruptures the important relationship between adult and child.

Of those teachers and parents who make a point of not punishing children, a significant proportion turn instead to the use of rewards. The ways in which rewards are used, as well the values that are considered important, differ among (and within) cultures. This digest, however, deals with typical practices in classrooms in the United States, where stickers and stars, A's and praise, awards and privileges, are routinely used to induce children to learn or comply with an adult's demands (Fantuzzo et al., 1991). As with punishments, the offer of rewards can elicit temporary compliance in many cases. Unfortunately, carrots turn out to be no more effective than sticks at helping children to become caring, responsible people or lifelong, self-directed learners.

Rewards vs. Good Values

Studies over many years have found that behavior modification programs are rarely successful at producing lasting changes in attitudes or even behavior. When the rewards stop, people usually return to the way they acted before the program began. More disturbingly, researchers have recently discovered that children whose parents make frequent use of rewards tend to be less generous than their peers (Fabes et al., 1989; Grusec, 1991; Kohn 1990).

Indeed, extrinsic motivators do not alter the emotional or cognitive *commitments* that underlie behavior—at least not in a desirable direction. A child promised a treat for learning or acting responsibly has been given every reason to stop doing so when there is no longer a reward to be gained.

Research and logic suggest that punishment and rewards are not really opposites, but two sides of the same coin. Both strategies amount to ways of trying to manipulate someone's behavior—in one case, prompting the question, "What do they want me to do, and what happens to me if I don't do it?", and in the other instance, leading a child to ask, "What do they want me to do, and what do I get for doing it?" Neither strategy helps children to grapple with the question, "What kind of person do I want to be?"

Rewards vs. Achievement

Rewards are no more helpful at enhancing achievement than they are at fostering good values. At least two dozen studies have shown that people expecting to receive a reward for completing a task (or for doing it successfully) simply do not perform as well as those who expect nothing (Kohn, 1993). This effect is robust for young children, older children, and adults; for males and females; for rewards of all kinds; and for tasks ranging from memorizing facts to designing collages to solving problems. In general, the more cognitive sophistication and open-ended thinking that is required for a task, the worse people tend to do when they have been led to perform that task for a reward.

There are several plausible explanations for this puzzling but remarkably consistent finding. The most compelling of these is that *rewards cause people to lose interest in whatever they were rewarded for doing.* This phenomenon, which has been demonstrated in scores of studies (Kohn, 1993), makes sense given that "motivation" is not a single characteristic that an individual possesses to a greater or lesser degree. Rather, intrinsic motivation (an interest in the task for its own sake) is qualitatively different from extrinsic motivation (in which completion of the task is seen chiefly as a prerequisite for obtaining something else) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, the question educators need to ask is not how motivated their students are, but how their students are motivated.

In one representative study, young children were introduced to an unfamiliar beverage called kefir. Some were just asked to drink it; others were praised lavishly for doing so; a third group was promised treats if they drank enough. Those children who received either verbal or tangible rewards consumed more of the beverage than other children, as one might predict. But a week later these children found it significantly less appealing than they did before, whereas children who were offered no rewards liked it just as much as, if not more than, they had earlier (Birch et al., 1984). If we substitute reading or doing math or acting generously for drinking kefir, we begin to glimpse the destructive power of rewards. The data suggest that the more we want children to *want* to do something, the more counterproductive it will be to reward them for doing it.

Deci and Ryan (1985) describe the use of rewards as "control through seduction." Control, whether by threats or bribes, amounts to doing things *to* children rather than working *with* them. This ultimately frays relationships, both among students (leading to reduced interest in working with peers) and

between students and adults (insofar as asking for help may reduce the probability of receiving a reward).

Moreover, students who are encouraged to think about grades, stickers, or other "goodies" become less inclined to explore ideas, think creatively, and take chances. At least ten studies have shown that people offered a reward generally choose the easiest possible task (Kohn, 1993). In the absence of rewards, by contrast, children are inclined to pick tasks that are just beyond their current level of ability.

Practical Implications of the Failure of Rewards

The implications of this analysis and these data are troubling. If the question is "Do rewards motivate students?", the answer is, "Absolutely: they motivate students to get rewards." Unfortunately, that sort of motivation often comes at the expense of interest in, and excellence at, whatever they are doing. What is required, then, is nothing short of a transformation of our schools.

First, classroom management programs that rely on rewards and consequences ought to be avoided by any educator who wants students to take responsibility for their own (and others') behavior—and by any educator who places internalization of positive values ahead of mindless obedience. The alternative to bribes and threats is to work toward creating a caring community whose members solve problems collaboratively and decide together how they want their classroom to be (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Solomon et al., 1992).

Second, grades in particular have been found to have a detrimental effect on creative thinking, long-term retention, interest in learning, and preference for challenging tasks (Butler & Nisan, 1986; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). These detrimental effects are not the result of too many bad grades, too many good grades, or the wrong formula for calculating grades. Rather, they result from the practice of grading itself, and the extrinsic orientation it promotes. Parental use of rewards or consequences to induce children to do well in school has a similarly negative effect on enjoyment of learning and, ultimately, on achievement (Gottfried et al., 1994). Avoiding these effects requires assessment practices geared toward helping students experience success and failure not as reward and punishment, but as information.

Finally, this distinction between reward and information might be applied to positive feedback as well. While it can be useful to hear about one's successes, and highly desirable to receive support and encouragement from adults, most praise is tantamount to verbal reward. Rather than helping children to develop their own criteria for successful learning or desirable behavior, praise can create a growing dependence on securing someone else's approval. Rather than offering unconditional support, praise makes a positive response conditional on doing what the adult demands. Rather than heightening interest in a task, the learning is devalued insofar as it comes to be seen as a prerequisite for receiving the teacher's approval (Kohn, 1993).

Conclusion

In short, good values have to be grown from the inside out. Attempts to short-circuit this process by dangling rewards in front of children are at best ineffective, and at worst counterproductive. Children are likely to become enthusiastic, lifelong learners as a result of being provided with an engaging curriculum; a safe, caring community in which to discover and create; and a significant degree of choice about what (and how and why) they are learning. Rewards—like punishments—are unnecessary when these things are present, and are ultimately destructive in any case.

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Self-Esteem and Narcissism: Implications for Practice

Lilian G. Katz

Helping children to "feel good about themselves" is frequently listed as an important goal of early education. For example, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990) listed the development of "a positive self-image" first among the characteristics of a good quality early childhood program. One newsletter for teachers quotes a statement that "the basis for *everything* we do is self-esteem. Therefore, if we can do something to give children a stronger sense of themselves, starting in preschool, they'll be [a lot wiser] in the choices they make" (McDaniel, 1986).

Early Childhood Practices: Narcissism versus Self Esteem

While the development of high self-esteem seems a worthwhile goal, many practices designed to reach it may instead be encouraging narcissism. This confusion is exemplified by a practice observed in a first grade classroom. Each child had produced a booklet titled "All About Me," consisting of dittoed pages prepared by the teacher, on which the child had provided information. The first page asked for a list of basic information about the child's home and family. The second page was titled "What I like to eat," the third "What I like to watch on TV," the next "What I want for a present," and so forth. On each page the child's attention was directed toward his or her own inner gratification. The topic of each page in these booklets put the child in the role of consumer. No page was included that put the child in the role of producer, explorer, or problem solver.

Another common example of practices intended to enhance self-esteem but unlikely to do so was a display of kindergartners' work consisting of nine paper doll-like figures, each with a balloon containing a sentence stem beginning "I am special because..." The sentences depicted in the display read "I am special because I can color," "...I can ride a bike," and so forth. Although these skills are valuable, is there not some risk in encouraging children to believe that their specialness is dependent on these comparatively trivial things, rather than on more enduring dispositions such as persistence in the face of difficulty and readiness to help their classmates?

Teachers often employ practices intended to motivate children by beginning "where they are." However, the same intentions could be satisfied in other ways. Starting "where children are" can be accomplished by providing topics that would encourage curiosity about others *and* themselves, reduce emphasis on consumerism, and at the same time strengthen the intellectual ethos of the classroom.

Such a project was observed in a rural British infant school. A large display on the bulletin board was titled "We Are a Class Full of Bodies." Just below the title was the heading "Here Are the Details." The display space was taken up with bar graphs of the children's weights and heights, eye colors, shoe sizes, and so forth. As the children worked in small groups collecting information brought from home, taking measurements, and preparing graphs together, the teacher was able to create an ethos of a community of researchers. This project began "where the children were" by collecting, pooling, analyzing, and displaying data derived from all the children in the class.

Self-Esteem: Developmental and Cross-Cultural Considerations

In an examination of developmental considerations, Bednar, Wells, and Peterson (1989) suggest that feelings of competence and the self-esteem associated with them are enhanced in children when their parents provide an optimum mixture of acceptance, affection, limits, and expectations. In a similar way, teachers are likely to engender positive feelings when they provide such a combination of acceptance, limits, and expectations concerning behavior and effort (Lamborn et al., 1991).

Markus and Kitayama (1991) point out that the concept of the self varies among cultures, and that Westerners typically construe themselves as *independent*, stable entities. On the other hand, they assert that in Asia and Africa the self is viewed as *interdependent* and connected with the social context. Westerners view the self as an autonomous entity consisting of a unique configuration of traits. The Asian view is that the self exists primarily in relation to specific social contexts, and is esteemed to the extent that it can adjust to others and maintain harmony.

Appropriate Practices

The trend toward excessive emphasis on self-esteem and self-congratulation described above may be due to a general desire to correct earlier traditions of avoiding complimenting children for fear of making them conceited. However, the current practices described above may be overcorrections of such traditions.

Self-esteem is most likely to be fostered when children are esteemed and treated respectfully and receive the right kind of positive, meaningful feedback in the form of appreciation, rather than empty praise and flattery. Appreciation is positive feedback related explicitly and directly to the *content* of the child's interest and effort. A teacher might, for example, bring a new reference book to class in response to a question raised by a child. In this way, the teacher provides positive feedback without taking the children's minds off the subject. Self-esteem can be based on increased understanding and competence, as well as on contributing to the work of the group.

Healthy self-esteem is more likely to be developed when children are engaged in activities for which they can make real decisions and contributions than in activities that are frivolous and cute. Early childhood educators have traditionally emphasized the fact that play is children's natural way of learning (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 1988). Besides play, however, it is just as natural for young children to learn through investigation. Young children are born scientists. They devote enormous amounts of time and energy to investigating the environments in which they are raised.

Teachers can capitalize on these in-born dispositions by engaging children in investigations through project work, investigations that are in-depth studies of real topics, environments, events, and objects worthy of children's attention and understanding (Katz & Chard, 1989). In the course of such undertakings, children negotiate with their teachers to determine the questions to be answered, the studies to be undertaken, and ways of representing their findings in media such as painting, drawing, and dramatic play. Project work provides children with opportunity for discussion, decision making, cooperation, initiative, negotiation, compromise, and evaluation of the outcomes of their own efforts. In this way, children's self-esteem can be based on their contribution to the work of the group.

Children's self-esteem can also be strengthened when they have the opportunity to develop and apply criteria for evaluating their own work. For example, instead of taking work home daily, they can be encouraged to collect it for a week or more, after which the teacher can discuss possible criteria for selecting an item they wish to take home. The emphasis should not be on whether they like a piece of work, but on whether the piece includes all they want it to, or whether it is as clear or informative as they want it to be. Similarly, when children are engaged in project work with others, they can evaluate the extent to which they have answered the questions they began with, and assess the work accomplished on criteria developed with their teacher concerning the accuracy, completeness, and interest value of their final products (Katz & Chard, 1989).

Conclusion

Practices which engage children's minds in investigating aspects of their own experiences and environments can help them develop realistic criteria of self-esteem. Such practices are more likely than trivial practices which engender self-preoccupation to build in children a deep sense of competence and self-worth that can provide a firm foundation for their future.

Editor's Note: This Digest is excerpted from the paper *Distinctions between Self-Esteem and Narcissism: Implications for Practice* (available from ERIC/EECE; approximately 80 pages; $10.00).

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Young Children's Social Development: A Checklist

Diane E. McClellan and Lilian G. Katz

Early childhood educators have traditionally given high priority to enhancing young children's social development. During the last two decades a convincing body of evidence has accumulated to indicate that unless children achieve minimal social competence by about the age of six years, they have a high probability of being at risk throughout life. Hartup suggests that peer relationships contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults (1992). He states that:

> Indeed, the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is *not* IQ, *not* school grades, and *not* classroom behavior but, rather the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously "at risk" (Hartup, 1992).

The risks are many: poor mental health, dropping out of school, low achievement and other school difficulties, poor employment history, and so forth (see Katz and McClellan, 1991). Given the life-long consequences, relationships should be counted as the first of the four R's of education.

Because social development begins in the early years, it is appropriate that all early childhood programs include regular periodic formal and informal assessment of children's progress in the acquisition of social competence. The set of items presented below is based largely on research identifying elements of social competence in young children, and on studies in which the behavior of well-liked children has been compared to that of less well-liked children (Katz and McClellan, 1991).

The Social Attributes Checklist

The checklist provided in this digest includes attributes of a child's social behavior and preschool experience which teachers should examine every three or four months. Consultations with parents and other caregivers help make the attributes and assessments realistic and reliable.

In using the checklist, teachers should pay attention to whether the attributes are typical. This requires sampling the child's functioning over a period of about three or four weeks. Any child can have one or two really bad days, for a variety of reasons; if assessments are to be reasonably reliable, judgments of the overall pattern of functioning over a period of about a month is required.

Healthy social development does not require that a child be a "social butterfly." The quality rather than quantity of a child's friendships is the important index to note. Keep in mind also that there is evidence that some children are simply shyer than others, and it may be counter-productive to push such children into social relations which make them uncomfortable (Katz and McClellan, 1991). Furthermore, unless that shyness is severe enough to prevent a child from enjoying most of the "good things of life," like birthday parties, picnics, and family outings, it is reasonable to assume that, when handled sensitively, the shyness will be spontaneously outgrown.

Many of the attributes listed in the checklist in this digest indicate adequate social growth if they *usually* characterize the child. This qualifier is included to ensure that occasional fluctuations do not lead to over-interpretation of children's temporary difficulties. On the basis of frequent direct contact with the child, observation in a variety of situations, and information obtained from parents and other caregivers, a teacher or caregiver can assess each child according to the checklist.

Teachers can observe and monitor interactions among the children and let children who rarely have difficulties attempt to solve conflicts by themselves before intervening. If a child appears to be doing well on most of the attributes and characteristics in the checklist, then it is reasonable to assume that occasional social difficulties will be outgrown without intervention.

However, if a child seems to be doing poorly on many of the items on the list, the adults responsible for his or her care can implement strategies that will help the child to overcome and outgrow social difficulties. We suggest that this checklist be used as a guide among teachers and parents. The intent is not to supply a prescription for "correct social behavior," but rather to help teachers observe, understand, and support children as they grow in social skillfulness. If a child seems to be doing poorly

The Social Attributes Checklist

I. Individual Attributes

The child:

1. Is **usually** in a positive mood
2. Is not **excessively** dependent on the teacher, assistant, or other adults
3. **Usually** comes to the program or setting willingly
4. **Usually** copes with rebuffs and reverses adequately
5. Shows the capacity to empathize
6. Has positive relationships with one or two peers; shows capacity to really care about them, miss them if absent, etc.
7. Displays the capacity for humor
8. Does not seem to be acutely or chronically lonely

II. Social Skill Attributes

The child **usually**:

1. Approaches others positively
2. Expresses wishes and preferences clearly; gives reasons for actions and positions
3. Asserts own rights and needs appropriately
4. Is not easily intimidated by bullies
5. Expresses frustrations and anger effectively and without harming others or property
6. Gains access to ongoing groups at play and work
7. Enters ongoing discussion on the subject; makes relevant contributions to ongoing activities
8. Takes turns fairly easily
9. Shows interest in others; exchanges information with and requests information from others appropriately
10. Negotiates and compromises with others appropriately
11. Does not draw inappropriate attention to self
12. Accepts and enjoys peers and adults of ethnic groups other than his or her own
13. Interacts non-verbally with other children with smiles, waves, nods, etc.

III. Peer Relationship Attributes

The child is:

1. **Usually** accepted versus neglected or rejected by other children
2. **Sometimes** invited by other children to join them in play, friendship, and work.

on many of the items on the list, the adults responsible for his or her care can implement strategies that will help the child to establish more satisfying relationships with other children (Katz and McClellan, 1991).

Finally, it is also important to keep in mind that children vary in social behavior for a variety of reasons. Research indicates that children have distinct personalities and temperaments from birth. In addition, nuclear and extended family relationships obviously affect social behavior. What is appropriate or effective social behavior in one culture may be less effective in another culture. Children from diverse cultural and family backgrounds thus may need help in bridging their differences and in finding ways to learn from and enjoy the company of one another. Teachers have a responsibility to be proactive rather than laissez faire in creating a classroom community that is open, honest, and accepting.

This digest is adapted from the article, "Assessing the Social Development of Young Children. A Checklist of Social Attributes," which appeared in the Fall 1992 issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood* (pp. 9-10).

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Dispositions as Educational Goals

Lilian G. Katz

One of the major questions to be addressed when developing a curriculum is, What should be learned? One way to answer this question (Katz, 1991) is to adopt at least four types of learning goals, those related to knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings. The acquisition of both knowledge and skills is taken for granted as an educational goal, and most educators would also readily agree that many feelings (e.g., self-esteem) are also influenced by school experiences and are thus worthy of inclusion among learning goals. However, dispositions are seldom included, although they are often implied by the inclusion of attitudes (e.g., attitudes toward learning) as goals. The main purpose of this digest is to examine the meaning of the term *disposition* and to suggest the implications of dispositions for practice.

What Are Dispositions?

It seems clear that the term *disposition* can be used to distinguish trends in behavior from skills, attitudes, traits, and mindless habits (e.g., fastening one's seat belt), and that these distinctions have useful, practical implications even in the absence of desirable precision. Concerning skills, for example, educators, and most likely other observers as well, recognize that it is possible to have skills and lack a taste for or habit of using them. Similarly, knowledge can be acquired without having the disposition to use it. Further clarification of the nature of dispositions may be obtained by distinguishing dispositions from related constructs such as thought processes, motives, and work inhibition.

For the purposes of exploring the implications of dispositions, the following tentative definition is proposed:

> A disposition is a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal.

In the case of curiosity, for example, children can be said to have the disposition to be curious if they typically and frequently respond to their environment by exploring, examining, and asking questions about it. Similarly, the disposition to complain or whine would be robust if exhibited frequently, and weak if rarely exhibited. Both are examples of dispositions: they are intentional and mindfully directed toward particular objects and situations in order to achieve goals. Because not all dispositions are desirable, teaching practices must seek not only to strengthen the desirable ones, but also to weaken the undesirable ones.

Implications for Practitioners

There are several reasons for suggesting that dispositions should be included among educational goals. The most important reason is, as already mentioned, that the acquisition of knowledge and skills does not guarantee that they will be used and applied. As Cantor (1990) puts it, "having" is not necessarily "doing." For example, it is likely that most children have listening skills, but they may or may not have the disposition to be listeners. Teaching practices should take into account ways that the dispositions associated with skills can be strengthened.

Second, dispositional considerations are important because the instructional processes by which some knowledge and skills are acquired may themselves damage or undermine the disposition to use them. For example, one risk of early formal instruction in reading skills is that the amount of drill and practice required for successful reading of the English language at an early age may undermine children's dispositions to be readers (Katz, 1992).

It is clearly not useful for a child to learn skills if, in the processes of learning them, the disposition to use them is damaged. On the other hand, having the disposition to be a reader without the requisite skills would also not be desirable. Thus the acquisition of reading skills and the disposition to be a reader should be mutually inclusive goals of education.

Third, some important dispositions relevant to education, such as the disposition to investigate, may be thought of as inborn. When children's experiences support the manifestations of a disposition with appropriate scaffolding (see Rogoff, Gauvain, and Ellis, 1990) and environmental conditions, the disposition is likely to

become robust. Without such supportive experiences it is likely to weaken or perhaps be extinguished. Though knowledge and skills not acquired early in life might be acquired later, dispositions are probably less amenable to reacquisition once damaged.

Fourth, the processes of selecting curriculum and teaching strategies should include considerations of how desirable dispositions can be strengthened and undesirable dispositions can be weakened. Therefore, when selecting teaching practices, opportunities for children to exhibit desirable dispositions should be considered. For example, if the disposition to accept peers of diverse backgrounds is to be strengthened, then opportunities to engage in that behavior must be available.

Fifth, on the basis of the evidence accumulated from research on mastery versus performance motivation, it seems reasonable to suggest that there is an optimum amount of positive feedback for young children above which children may become preoccupied with their performance and the judgments of others rather than involved in the task, and hence their achievement would be acquired at the expense of their disposition to learn.

Sixth, dispositions are less likely to be acquired through didactic processes than to be modeled by young children as they are around people who exhibit them. If teachers want their young pupils to have robust dispositions to investigate, hypothesize, experiment, and so forth, they might consider making their own such intellectual dispositions more visible to the children. The list of potential ways that teachers could exhibit the intellectual dispositions to be strengthened and supported is very long and deserves serious attention in the course of curriculum planning and teacher education.

Conclusion

Much research is needed to determine which dispositions merit attention. It seems timely to include dispositions among important outcomes of education at every level. By doing so we are likely to pay more deliberate attention to ways in which desirable ones can be strengthened, and undesirable ones can be weakened. For the moment, one of the most important dispositions to be listed in educational goals is the disposition to go on learning. Any educational approach that undermines that disposition is miseducation.

Adapted from *Dispositions: Definitions and Implications for Early Childhood Practices*, by Lilian G. Katz. Urbana, IL:ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. 1993. (Catalog #211; 47pp.; $5).

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Beginning Reading

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How to teach reading has been the subject of much debate over the years. One reason may be because, to the reading public, reading seems to be a fairly easy and natural thing to do. However, this apparent ease masks the very real and complex processes involved in the act of reading.

The truth is that learning to read is anything but natural. In fact, it does not develop incidentally; it requires human intervention and context. While skillful readers look quite natural in their reading, the act of reading is complex and intentional; it requires bringing together a number of complex actions involving the eyes, the brain, and the psychology of the mind (e.g., motivation, interest, past experience) that do not occur naturally.

The two processes described here phonological awareness and word recognition are essential to teaching beginning reading to children with diverse learning and curricular needs, such as students with learning disabilities. For these children, as for many children, learning to read is neither natural nor easy. Also, research has made it clear that, or those students who fall behind in reading, opportunities to advance or catch up diminish over time. Therefore, the teaching of beginning reading is of supreme importance and must be purposeful, strategic, and grounded in the methods proven effective by research.

The Sound of Words

The "unnatural" act of reading requires a beginning reader to make sense of symbols on a page (i.e., to read words and interpret the meanings of those words). In the case of English, these symbols are actually sequences of letters that represent an alphabetic language, but more important, the printed letters can also be translated into sounds. To translate letters into sounds, a beginning reader should "enter school with a conscious awareness of the sound structure of words and the ability to manipulate sounds in words" (Smith, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995, p. 2). This is referred to as phonological awareness.

The research is clear and substantial, and the evidence is unequivocal: Students who enter first grade with a wealth of phonological awareness are more successful readers than those who do not.

Some examples of phonological awareness activities include asking a child to respond to the following (Stanovich, 1994):

1. What would be left out if the /k/ sound were taken away from cat?
2. What do you have if you put these sounds together: /s/, /a/, /t/?
3. What is the first sound in rose?

In these activities, students do not see any written words or letters. Instead, they listen and respond entirely on the basis of what they hear.

For some children, performing these activities may be difficult for various reasons. For example, they may not be able to process the sounds or phonemes that comprise a word. Other children simply cannot hear the different sounds in a word, although the problem is not with hearing acuity, but with the nature of phonemes. Phonemes are easily distorted, and the boundaries for determining where one sound ends and the other begins are not entirely clear to the ear and brain.

Phonological awareness activities build on and enhance children's experiences with written language (e.g., print awareness) and spoken language (e.g., playing with words). These activities also set children's readiness and foundation for reading, especially the reading of words. Children who have been immersed in a literacy environ- ment in which words, word games, rhyming, and story reading are plentiful are more likely to understand what reading is all about than those who have experienced an impoverished literacy environment. A beginning reader with successful phonological awareness is ostensibly ready for word recognition activities.

Teaching Tips: Phonological Awareness and Alphabetic Understanding

1. Make phonological awareness instruction explicit. Use conspicuous strategies and make phonemes prominent to students by modeling specific sounds and asking students to reproduce the sounds.

2. Ease into the complexities of phonological awareness. Begin with easy words and progress to more difficult ones.

3. Provide support and assistance. The following research-based instructional sequence summarizes the kind of scaffolding beginning readers need:

(a) Model the sound or the strategy for making the sound.
(b) Have students use the strategy to produce the sound.
(c) Repeat steps (a) and (b) using several sounds for each type and level of difficulty.

(d) Prompt students to use the strategy during guided practice.
(e) Use steps (a) through (d) to introduce more difficult examples.

4.Develop a sequence and schedule, tailored to each child's needs, for opportunities to apply and develop facility with sounds. Give this schedule top priority among all classroom activities.

Reading Words

According to Juel (1991), children who are ready to begin reading words have developed the following prerequisite skills. They understand that (a) words can be spoken or written, (b) print corresponds to speech, and (c) words are composed of phonemes (sounds). (This is phonological awareness.) Beginning readers with these skills are also more likely to gain the understanding that words are composed of individual letters and that these letters correspond to sounds. This "mapping of print to speech" that establishes a clear link between a letter and a sound is referred to as alphabetic understanding.

The research on word recognition is clear and widely accepted, and the general finding is straightforward: Reading comprehension and other higher-order reading activities depend on strong word recognition skills. These skills include phonological decoding. This means that, to read words, a reader must first see a word and then access its meaning in memory (Chard, Simmons & Kameenui, 1995).

But to do this, the reader must do the following:

1.Translate a word into its phonological counterpart, (e.g., the word sat is translated into the individual phonemes (/s/, /a/, and /t/).

2.Remember the correct sequence of sounds.

3.Blend the sounds together.

4.Search his or her memory for a real word that matches the string of sounds (/s/, /a/, and /t/).

Skillful readers do this so automatically and rapidly that it looks like the natural reading of whole words and not the sequential translation of letters into sounds and sounds into words. Mastering the prerequisites for word recognition may be enough for many children to make the link between the written word and its meaning with little guidance. For some children, however, more explicit teaching of word recognition is necessary.

Beginning reading is the solid foundation on which almost all subsequent learning takes places. All children need this foundation, and research has shown the way to building it for students with diverse needs and abilities.

Teaching Tips: Reading Words

1. Develop explicit awareness of the connection between sounds and letters and sounds and words: Teach letter-sound correspondence by presenting the letter and modeling the sound. Model the sounds of the word, then blend the sound together and say the word.

2. Attend to (a) the sequence in which letter-sound correspondences are taught; (b) the speed with which the student moves from sounding out to blending words to reading connected text; and (c) the size and familiarity of the words.

3. Support learning by modeling new sounds and words, correcting errors promptly and explicitly, and sequencing reading tasks from easy to more difficult.

4. Schedule opportunities to practice and review each task, according to the child's needs, and give them top priority.

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Homeschooling Gifted Students: An Introductory Guide for Parents

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During the last 20 years, increasing numbers of families in the United States have chosen to educate their children at home or outside the conventional school environment. Current estimates range from 500,000 to 1.2 million students (Lines, 1991, 1995; Ray, 1996). Of that number, a significant percentage of families have chosen homeschooling as the educational option for their gifted children.

Challenges and Opportunities

When families consider homeschooling, there are many issues to explore.

Time commitment. Homeschooling requires an enormous time commitment by at least one parent. However, many parents of highly gifted children are already actively committed to their children's education. Parents find themselves trying to squeeze in extra hours for music, dance, and art. Frequently, their evenings are spent enriching the classroom curriculum so their children will continue to be academically challenged. These parents claim that homeschooling is a way to tailor their children's education to specific needs and interests at the appropriate academic challenge level, and to create an integrated educational environment that includes a wide range of activities.

Talk together as a family to decide if this is the appropriate choice for you. As with any educational option, homeschooling works better for some students and parents than for others. Some find the demands and intensity of homeschooling to be too stressful; others love the freedom and challenge.

Resources and financial considerations. Homeschooling parents use many resources and materials. These can become expensive, but there are ways to defray some of the costs. Homeschooling parents can borrow from each other, share resources, and make use of common items in the house and natural environments for curriculum material. The public library is a rich resource for books and videos. Many libraries offer interlibrary loans and vacation-loan extensions to the public. The Internet offers a wealth of highly sophisticated information, especially in the academic subject areas. A computer in the

house is an advantage, but there are other ways to gain access to the Internet; for example, some public libraries and schools offer access.

When considering homeschooling, explore resources and materials in advance. At all levels, verify the type of support schools will provide. If they have a gifted program, they may provide curriculum suggestions and guidelines. Contact others who are homeschooling through your state's homeschooling network.

Academic considerations. Homeschooling can offer increased flexibility and academic challenge. Flexibility is particularly important since many gifted students are uneven in their abilities. For example, a child may be several years ahead in math, but struggling with reading or writing.

Some children excel in all areas and require academic challenges to remain motivated in school. Many of these students sit idly, waiting for the class to catch up (U.S. Department of Education, 1994b). A rigorous, academically challenging curriculum offers the opportunity to insert depth and breadth. For example, the use of primary or original sources and advanced reading material may lead the gifted learner into critical thinking about an academic subject area or an interdisciplinary approach to subject matter. Projects, hands-on learning, and problem-based learning may provide interesting approaches to academic content.

Gifted homeschoolers enjoy opportunities to develop in multifaceted ways and pursue interests without time and curriculum constraints. Individual learning, tutorials, and small group classes are some of the options.

Social considerations. Many people have expressed concern about the social life and potential isolation of homeschooled children. Studies of social adjustment and self-esteem indicate that home-educated students are likely to be socially and psychologically healthy (Montgomery, 1989; Shyers, 1992; Taylor, 1986). Homeschooled students tend to have a broader age-range of friends than their schooled peers, which may encourage maturity and leadership skills (Montgomery, 1989). Homeschoolers are not necessarily isolated from others of their age; they meet and socialize with peers in their neighborhood and at community classes and activities.

With concerted effort by families, most homeschoolers can find avenues for social and intellectual interaction. When a student is interested in a topic, efforts can be made to ensure that the student talks with people of various backgrounds and viewpoints. A mentor working individually with the student may add stimulation and challenge. Professional societies and community organizations are a good place to start looking for people interested in sciences such as astronomy, visual and performing arts, and music. Libraries, museums, parks departments, historical sites, scout and sport programs, local businesses, religious groups, and theater groups expand homeschooling programs. Some homeschool groups have formed their own sports teams, and participate in community

leagues. Homeschoolers benefit from volunteering in agencies such as hospitals, nature centers, museums, parks, libraries, and businesses.

Legal considerations. Homeschooling is legal in all 50 states, Canada, and many other countries. Some states require that parents notify the local school district of their intent to homeschool; others require parents to register with the state department of education. Some permit a homeschool to register as a private school. Many states require yearly proof of student progress. Some states have additional requirements, such as the submission of a curriculum plan or education requirements for parents. Except for yearly standardized testing as an assessment of student achievement, services for homeschoolers have not been routinely available from the states. A few states permit homeschooled students to participate in public school classes or activities. Many state education agencies have a homeschooling liaison to help families understand state requirements. Federally mandated special education services may be available to homeschooled students through the public schools.

Since states vary in their specific requirements, obtain a copy of your state's homeschool law from your state department of education or your state legislator's office. Local homeschool support groups are good sources of information on complying with the local laws and regulations.

Ways to Homeschool

There are many methods of homeschooling; no single method is best. Success often comes through experience, confidence, and willingness to experiment. Many parents prefer the structure and security of a correspondence or purchased curriculum in the first year, switching to their own tailored program once they have developed experience and feel more confident. Some parents prefer to use textbooks and commercial curricula; others prefer to use a variety of resources. Some parents opt to teach all subject areas to their children; others seek out classes or tutorials for some or all of the subjects, especially for homeschooled high school students. Approaches may vary with individual children and change over time as demands and experiences alter their lives. Reading accounts of other homeschool experiences and getting to know other homeschoolers offers perspective, ideas, and appreciation for the many ways of homeschooling.

What Resources are Available to Develop or Assess the Quality of a Homeschool Curriculum?

Testing and evaluations of subject area competencies can be useful in planning an educational program and assessing its outcomes. A combination of assessments normally provides the most complete picture of a child's progress. Off-grade standardized testing and portfolio evaluations may also be appropriate. Standardized grade-level achievement tests may be available from your local school district or state department of education. These tests can be used to ensure that students are keeping up with local school district grade level competencies. Homeschooling families should plan for objective assessment

as part of the curriculum. Not only does objective assessment document achievement, but the results should inform program planning. To investigate the topic of assessment, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (1-800-GO4-ERIC).

Model content and performance standards are available in many of the subject areas. Content standards define what students should know and be able to do. They describe the knowledge, skills, and understanding that students should have in order to attain high levels of competency in challenging subject matter (U.S. Department of Education, 1994a). Performance standards identify the levels of achievement in the subject matter set out in the content standards and state how well students demonstrate their competency in a subject (U.S. Department of Education, 1994a). By following the basic academic standards set by the states or the national subject area standards, parents have a rich framework from which to develop challenging curriculum. Homeschooling resources and information on obtaining standards is provided in ERICEC Minibibliography EB18, which is part 2 of this digest.

International, national, and regional competitions may be valuable assessments of and incentives for achievement. Further, competitions may provide feedback as to how the student compares with others who are interested in the same area. Regional and national competitions can be found in most fields, including math, science, computer programming, writing, engineering, geography, environmental, art, music, and dance. Specific examples are included in Homeschooling Resources (EB18). A selected list of competitions and activities can be obtained for a fee from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

How Well Do Homeschoolers Perform?

One way to compare homeschooled students with peers who attend public schools is to use standardized achievement test scores. A study of homeschooled student scores on standardized achievement tests shows higher scores than the general population (National Home Education Research Institute, 1997). Galloway (1995) investigated homeschooled graduates' potential for success in college by comparing their performance with students from conventional schools and found insignificant differences, except in the ACT English subtest scores. Homeschooled students earned higher scores in that subtest.

What About College?

The later high school years should be structured with college applications in mind. These years may be managed in a variety of ways. Some students remain in homeschooling and receive no diploma. Others choose to reenter public school during high school to align themselves with peers and obtain a standard diploma. Others select a combination that will take advantage of Advanced Placement courses or other academic and extracurricular offerings.

Limited research suggests that the home educated do well in college (Sutton & de Oliveira, 1995; Galloway, & Sutton, 1995). Furthermore, homeschoolers may find the unique experiences and abilities gained through homeschooling make them attractive to competitive colleges. Check with the colleges of interest to determine if they have specific application requirements for homeschoolers. When standard high school student transcripts are not available, colleges may need other information to make an informed decision. SAT scores may be given more weight, since they are a way of comparing a homeschooler to the general college-bound population. Transcripts from community college courses taken during high school years can be useful. Letters of recommendation from persons who have worked with the homeschooler in tutorials, apprenticeships, community service, and social activities may prove very valuable. A detailed description of unique homeschool courses, in-depth independent projects, competitions, publications, and community service activities will help a college understand the quality of an applicant's homeschool education and recognize the student as a competitive applicant. An interview, when offered by a college or university, is particularly important for homeschool applicants.

Where Can Families Get Information?

This digest has an accompanying bibliography (EB18) that provides a wide variety of resources. The following resources and others cited in their bibliographies are another place to start. There are many parent discussion groups on the Internet that discuss homeschooling issues. Groups such as TAGFAM and TAG-L are listed on the ERIC EC website http://www.cec.sped.org/gifted/gt-menu.htm. Or, seek out a local homeschool support group. You can find one by checking with state organizations listed in some of the magazines and through some of the Internet sites listed in EB 18. Other sources include libraries; state and local boards of education, especially state or local gifted advocacy groups; La Leche League; and religious organizations. Be sure to look for groups that match the underlying philosophy that attracted you to homeschooling.

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Parent and Community Involvement in Rural Schools

1997 Digest
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ERIC® Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
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Researchers and educators have long agreed that when parents get involved in education, children try harder and achieve more at school (e.g., Epstein, 1995). Parents who help and encourage their children to learn at home, and who help develop positive attitudes toward school, contribute to the personal growth and academic success of their children.

Various approaches have been developed to help schools gain greater parent involvement. These approaches have several features in common: programs that focus on parenting skills and the development of home conditions that support learning; school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children's progress; the use of volunteers at school or in other locations to support the school and students; and participation by families in decision-making, governance, and advocacy (Bauch, 1994; Davies, 1991).

These approaches, however, were not developed with rural communities in mind. Rural communities differ from urban and suburban ones, and they also differ from one another (Flora, Spears, & Swanson, 1992). Parent involvement programs for rural communities work best when they respond to particular features of the communities they serve.

Opportunities and Challenges

Despite variability among communities, research does point to characteristics that are more common in rural areas than elsewhere and affect educators' efforts to involve parents. It is not clear, however, that rural communities are any more or less likely than urban or suburban ones to involve parents in the educational process. Research provides conflicting findings. A study of 296 schools in Missouri (Sun, Hobbs, & Elder, 1994), for example, found that parent involvement was higher in rural than in urban communities. In contrast, findings from a large national survey of eighth-grade students suggest that parent involvement tends to be higher in urban and suburban communities than in rural communities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). Johnson (1990), by contrast, found that suburban parents from middle- and upper middle-class communities were the most involved.

Even if parent involvement turns out to be more prevalent in rural than in urban and suburban schools, rural educators may still face special challenges often associated with rural life. Among these challenges are isolation, poverty, and lack of job opportunities. Isolation restricts rural schools and communities from making use of urban-based resources that might enhance educational programs--museums, research libraries, and colleges and universities (Capper, 1993). Furthermore, the poverty of many rural communities limits parents' ability to provide for their children and to augment their

children's education with resources in the home. Finally, the lack of job opportunities makes it harder for rural students to see any financial benefit to attendance or success in school (Bickel & Lange, 1995).

These circumstances lead some educators to conclude that rural families place a low value on the education of their children. This conclusion gains support from the finding that rural parents have lower educational attainment than their urban and suburban counterparts. As the argument goes, parents who lack personal experience of education beyond basic skills often fail to see its importance for their children. Further, they may feel intimidated by school procedures and expectations (Capper, 1993).

However, other evidence demonstrates the high value that rural residents often place on their schools. Not only do they view schools as a central focus of community life (Herzog & Pittman, 1995), residents in many rural areas support their schools with higher tax rates than those imposed in urban and suburban districts, where property values are higher (Stern, 1994). Educators can draw upon this community support to expand parent involvement programs in rural schools. In some rural communities, such programs have mobilized residents to work toward the combined revitalization of schools and rural economies (Miller, 1995).

Beneficial Program Features

Taking into account both the opportunities and challenges posed by conditions of rural life, educators can work to involve parents by setting up programs that include features with well-documented, positive results (see, e.g., Bauch, 1994; Davies, 1991; Hinson, 1990; Swick, 1991). Among the features most often recommended are parent enrollment in adult education and parenting education programs; cooperative strategies for extending the school curriculum beyond the school walls; efforts to help parents provide learning experiences at home; home visits by personnel trained to facilitate home-school communication; in-classroom involvement of parents, business leaders, and citizens; summer enrichment programs for both parents and children; community-based learning; use of school facilities for community activities; and university participation in an advisory and supportive role.

Programs that combine these features are indeed extensive, recognizing both strengths and weaknesses that parents may bring to partnerships with their children's schools. Such programs recognize that parenting improves when parents feel effective in a variety of adult roles. But they also take into account the fact that schooling improves when a variety of adults share their talents and model successful strategies of life management. Moreover, when community and business organizations have a visible presence in classroom life, students are more likely to see a meaningful connection between their studies and their eventual success in the workplace.

Promising Approaches

A number of ongoing efforts demonstrate ways that parent-school partnerships can work to improve education in rural areas. These approaches include Even Start, the Total Village Project, and the Teacher-Parent Partnership for the Enhancement of School Success. Noting the effectiveness of projects such as these, educational reform movements in rural states—the Kentucky Education Reform Act, for example—incorporate parent- and community-involvement activities into systemwide efforts to improve school outcomes.

Even Start, which was piloted in rural Montana, had as its expressed purpose "to improve the educational opportunities for children and their parents...through cooperative projects using existing education resources" (Center for Community Education, 1989, p. 2). Building on the key roles that parents play, the pilot project emphasized parents' participation as communicators, supporters, learners, teachers, advisors, and advocates. The project relied on a team of dedicated teachers and administrators who provided direct and indirect support—including focused training—to parents. The pilot demonstrated that the activities and materials developed by the R&D team at Montana State University were useful in getting parents more fully involved in their children's education.

The Total Village Project, which is being implemented in rural West Virginia, advocates a community effort to educate children. Through a family center, coordinated family services, home visits, parent-teacher action teams, mentoring, tutoring, and assistance to teachers, the project seeks to achieve its integrated objectives. These objectives include increases in parent attendance at meetings and activities, quality and quantity of parent involvement at home and school, student self-esteem, and regular attendance. Other objectives aim for improvement in standardized test results and parent, community, and school communication. (For more information contact Stan Maynard at the Department of Education at Marshall University in Huntington, WV.)

The primary purpose of the Teacher-Parent Partnership for the Enhancement of School Success was to "implement a school and home based program for young children which raises student achievement and increases educational opportunity" (Swick, 1991, p. 1). To achieve its primary goal, the project also worked to improve parents' self-confidence, increase parent-child interactions, improve home support for education, and strengthen the relationship between school personnel and families. Implemented in rural South Carolina, the project was a collaborative effort between the University of South Carolina and 18 rural school districts. It included training activities for teachers, parents, and children; intensive parent involvement activities; home-school workers; and a summer enrichment program (Swick, 1991).

The promising approaches discussed here all follow Herzog and Pittman's (1995, p. 118) advice: "For rural schools to be successful in combating their problems, they will have to capitalize on their community and family ties." This advice cautions rural educators to view parents and businesses as part of the solution, not as part of the problem. Such a

perspective need not overlook the fact that some parents may need special types of assistance, nor does it make the assumption that every community business will contribute positively to the schools. It does, however, favor positive action rather than unproductive blaming. Too often, rural communities are blamed for their problems. Stereotypical images replace thoughtful consideration of these places, their residents, and the problems they face. Projects that bring communities together have the potential to support school improvement, economic revitalization, and a renewed investment by community members in the vigorous traditions of rural life.

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Helping Children Overcome Reading Difficulties

Digest #72 July 1996
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ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication

Almost everyone knows a story about the nice little youngster (or sometimes, a grownup) who works hard but can't seem to learn to read and to write. The child's mother works with him or her at home, reading to the child and reading with the child. The child has a tutor at school. The youngster tries with all his/her might, even to the point of tears, but the symbols and the words won't stick. Though apparently learned today at great pain, tomorrow they will be gone. The question is: what do we know about problem readers that will help us guide them? This digest will discuss children with reading difficulties and how these children can be helped to read and learn more effectively.

Dyslexia

Most children begin reading and writing by the first, second, or third grade. By the time they are adults, most can't recall or can't remember what it was like not to be able to read and write, or how difficult it was to figure out how to translate patterns on a page into words, thoughts, and ideas. These same adults usually cannot understand why some children have not yet begun to read and write by the third grade. They have even more difficulty understanding how adults can function in our society with only the most rudimentary literacy skills.

Dyslexia is perhaps the learning disability that is most widely known, primarily because of Barbara Bush's efforts to make adults aware of the problem of children with this and other learning disabilities. Stories about children (and adults) trying to overcome their learning disabilities appear in the mass media with some regularity. Despite the relative familiarity of the word "dyslexia," there is no clear-cut, widely accepted definition for dyslexia. In the broadest sense, dyslexia refers to the overwhelming difficulty in learning to read and write by normally intelligent children exposed to suitable educational opportunities in school and
at home. These often very verbal children's reading levels fall far below what would have been predicted for their quick and alert intelligence (Bryant and Bradley, 1985).

Just as educators and researchers cannot agree on a specific and precise definition of dyslexia, they do not agree on the cause or causes. Recent research (Vellutino, 1987) has challenged many commonly held beliefs about dyslexia: dyslexia results in reversal of letters; dyslexics show uncertain hand preference; children whose first language is alphabetic rather than ideographic are more likely to have dyslexia; and dyslexia is correctable by developing strategies to strengthen the child's visual-spatial system. Instead, **dyslexia appears to be a complex linguistic deficiency marked be the inability to represent and access the sound of a word in order to help remember the word and the inability to break words into component sounds.**

It does appear that there might be a hereditary factor in dyslexia. In one study of 82 average children with reading problems, the children were divided into two groups, "specifics" (reading and spelling were their only difficult school subjects) and "generals" (problems with arithmetic as well as with literacy). When the families of the children in both groups were scanned for a history of reading problems, 40% of the families of the "specifics" showed problems among relatives, while among the "generals," only 25% showed problems. Thus, the specific disorder does seem to run in families more than the general disorder—a plus for the hereditary factor in dyslexia (Crowder and Wagner, 1992). More research is testing this factor.

It is important to remember that not all individuals who have problems with reading are dyslexic. And the diagnosis of dyslexia should only be made by a qualified reading professional. Many slow readers who are not dyslexic, however, can be helped with a variety of reading experiences to improve fluency.

Helping the Problem Reader

There is growing evidence that it might be more appropriate to refer to the amount of time a learner takes to complete a reading task rather than using qualitative labels, such as good, best, or poor reader (Smith, 1990). If we accept the premise that all individuals are capable of learning to read but some need to stretch their learning time, then we can search for adjustments. Slow readers could read shorter passages. In this way, they could finish a story and experience the success of sharing it with a parent or friend.

Let's examine some other conditions that will help improve comprehension for those learners sometimes labeled reading disabled. Besides reading more slowly, the person with reading difficulties can be asked to find specific kinds of information in a story, or can be paired with a more capable reader who will help in summarizing the essential points of the reading or in identifying the main ideas of a story.

One of the reasons that these learners read more slowly is that they seem less able to identify the organization of a passage of text (Wong and Wilson, 1984). Since efficient comprehension relies on the reader's ability to see the pattern or the direction that the writer is taking, parents and teachers can help these readers by spending more time on building background for the reading selection, both in the general sense of concept building and in the specific sense of creating a mental scheme for the text organization. Many times, drawing a simple diagram can help these readers greatly.

Direct intervention of parent or teacher or tutor in the comprehension process increases reading comprehension in slower readers (Bos, 1982). These readers often need help with vocabulary and need reminders to summarize as they proceed. They also need to ask themselves questions about what they are reading. The parent can prompt thinking or can provide an insight into the language that may otherwise elude the reader.

One effective strategy for slower readers is to generate visual images of what is being read (Carnine and Kinder, 1985). For the reader to generate images, he or she must first be able to recognize the word. Assuming the reader knows how to recognize words, he or she needs concepts to visualize the flow of action represented on the page. The same kind of concept building techniques that work for average readers also work for slower readers. The slower reader, however, gains more from concrete experiences and images than from abstract discussions. It is not enough for the parent to simply tell the slower reader to use
visual images—the parent has to describe the images that occur in his or her own mind as he or she reads a particular passage, thus giving the child a concrete sense of what visual imagery means. Pictures, physical action, demonstrations, practice using words in interviews or in an exchange of views among peers are only a few of the ways that parents, tutors, or teachers can make the key vocabulary take root in the reader's mind.

Helpful Reading Materials

As is the case with most learners, slower readers learn most comfortably with materials that are written on their ability level (Clark et al., 1984). The reading level is of primary concern, but parents can help their reader select helpful materials in other ways. Choose stories or books with (1) a reduced number of difficult words; (2) direct, non-convoluted syntax; (3) short passages that deliver clear messages; (4) subheads that organize the flow of ideas; and (5) helpful illustrations. Older problem readers often find that the newspaper is a good choice for improving reading comprehension (Monda, et al., 1988). Slow readers can succeed with the same frequency as faster readers as long as the parent or tutor maintains a positive attitude and selects materials and approaches that accommodate the child's learning speeds.

Importance of a Positive Attitude

A positive attitude on the part of the child is also crucial to the treatment of difficulties in reading and learning. Tutors who have worked consistently with problem learners are very aware of the role of the self in energizing learning, and the potential damage to the sense of self-worth that comes from labeling. Teachers and parents should appreciate children's thinking as the foundation of their language abilities, and maintain some flexibility in their expectations regarding their children's development of decoding skills such as reading. For children to feel successful, they need to become aware of their unique learning strengths, so that they may apply them effectively while working to strengthen the lagging areas (Webb, 1992). The child needs to feel loved and appreciated as an individual, whatever his or her difficulties in school.

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Forging Partnerships Between Mexican American Parents and the Schools

1995 Digest
Nancy Feyl Chavkin and Dora Lara Gonzalez
ERIC® Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 388 489

According to the Bureau of the Census (1994), there are approximately 13 million Mexican Americans in the United States. In her review of the status of education for Mexican American students, Sosa (1993) reports alarming statistics--a decline in high school completion rates, a steady rise in the dropout rate, and high numbers of students two or more years behind grade level. In light of these facts, educators have an educational imperative to look for new ways to work with Mexican American families. This digest describes research supporting family participation in students' education. It then describes barriers to participation faced by many Mexican American parents and successful programs and strategies for overcoming those barriers. Finally, the benefits of two-way communication and school-family partnerships are described.

Research on Parental Involvement and Student Achievement

Research has shown that one of the most promising ways to increase students' achievement is to involve their families (Chavkin, 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Herbert Walberg (1984) found that family participation in education was twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status. Establishing partnerships with families has many benefits for schools and families, but Epstein says, "the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life" (1995, p. 701).

Barriers to Parental Involvement

For many Mexican American parents, lack of involvement in their children's education is erroneously seen as lack of interest, but Montecel et al. (1993) present evidence that Mexican American parents do care about their children's education. The reasons for limited involvement include beliefs that the roles of home and school are sharply delineated. Mexican American parents see their role as being responsible for providing basic needs as well as instilling respect and proper behavior. They see the school's role as instilling knowledge (Nicolau & Ramos, 1993). They believe that one should not interfere with the job of the other. Nicolau and Ramos compare Mexican Americans' respect for teachers with the awe that most Americans have (or used to have) for doctors or priests.

Other barriers to parental involvement include a negative view of the school system, past negative experiences with education, and language barriers. Often parents view the school as a bureaucracy controlled by non-Hispanics. The school often reminds Mexican American parents of their own educational experiences including discrimination and humiliation for speaking Spanish. Many times the lack of bilingual staff can make parents

feel powerless when they are attempting to resolve problems or advocate for their children.

Opening the Doors to More Parental Involvement

How then can schools open the doors to more parental involvement and build partnerships with Mexican American families? Begin by making parental involvement easy and interesting, at a pace that is comfortable for parents. Outreach efforts can and will work, but they must be done in a culturally sensitive manner and begin with a strengths perspective. Mexican American families have many strengths and these strengths need to be recognized from the beginning. Nicolau and Ramos' (1993) examination of 42 projects provides helpful insights that can inform practice. Communication should be a major focus of the involvement effort. Reception areas in schools should include bilingual staff; telephone calls and written communication should be available in Spanish. For some parents, home visits or visits at a neutral site, such as a community center, offer a less threatening environment. In general, the more personal the approach, the better it works for Mexican American parents. Written correspondence is not as effective as the personal conference; in fact, it is wrong to assume that all families are literate.

If meetings seem appropriate, invitations should be extended by parents to parents, preferably neighbor to neighbor. A good idea for a first meeting is to ask parents who are more familiar with school personnel to bring three friends to a meeting at a community center outside the school. Meetings should be informal and based on the interests of the parents, with transportation and child care provided.

Selecting Programs and Activities

There are many programs and activities for parents and schools to consider. Some focus on family involvement in home learning activities and others focus on parents' continued education. Each school must select and adapt activities that best match the interests and needs of their families. The programs described below are only a sample of the successful approaches being used across the country (Goodson, Swartz, & Millsap, 1991).

Project FIEL (El Paso, Texas) was begun in 1985 and is in eight elementary schools in El Paso. This intergenerational literacy program involves limited-English-proficient parents and their kindergarten children in oral language, story writing, reading, discussions, and at-home activities.

Prestame una Comadre (Springfield, Illinois) means "loan me a godmother" in Spanish and works with migrant Head Start families. Social workers conduct home visits as often as three times weekly and hold small group meetings. Families work on increasing self-reliance, learning about child development and education, and improving family functioning.

Academia del Pueblo—developed by the National Council of La Raza—provides afterschool and summer classes for Hispanic children, monthly parent groups, and literacy classes three times a week. The program operates at the Guadalupe Center, a multiservice organization in Kansas City, Missouri.

McAllen Parental Involvement Program (McAllen, Texas) includes three core activities: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (PECES is the Spanish version of this commercially available curriculum), evening study centers, and parent meetings on a variety of topics.

Some effective programs are part of a national or state network or are supported by private funds. ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence (APEX) trains Latino parents to become effective advocates for their children at home and at school. The Hispanic Policy Development Project has worked with hundreds of parents using an enrichment model rather than a deficit approach. Project AVANCE, a privately funded program in San Antonio, Texas, uses door-to-door recruitment strategies as part of its outreach to develop parenting skills among low-income Mexican American mothers. Mother-daughter programs, developed at Texas universities, work to expand the role of Hispanic women by exposing them to nontraditional roles, campus field trips, and career activities. Empowerment programs such as Comite de Padres Latinos in Carpinteria, California (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), emphasize treating parents as valued participants and often lead to active participation by parents.

Using the Partnership Approach

Sustaining family involvement requires a commitment to open, continuous, two-way communication with Mexican American families. Most schools have established methods of one-way communication with parents, but the need for more two-way communication cannot be stressed enough. It is critically important for educators to take the time to listen to parents. The attitudes and practices of teachers and principals make a difference in the amount of parental involvement and in the achievement of students (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Sometimes educators overlook what they can learn from Mexican American families. These families are rich sources of information that can be used in the classroom. Parents have interacted with their children, and they know many of their learning styles as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Parents also know the community.

Partnerships with families require all participants to share responsibility for educational outcomes. This perspective represents a major shift for schools from merely delivering services to students to taking active, integrated roles that validate the cultural and social experiences of families. To succeed in this partnership role, staff need to ask parents for their ideas, meet with parent and community representatives to define goals, and develop a plan for parent and community involvement.

Training can help faculty and family members take on new roles needed for effective partnerships. Ongoing partnerships need evaluation and frequent checkpoints to see if

their goals and objectives are being met and if those goals and objectives are still appropriate. Keeping programs flexible helps everyone adjust to changes within the student body, families, the school staff, and the community.

Conclusion

There is a big difference between the rhetoric of partnerships and the activity of partnerships. Educators must truly believe and act on the belief that parents are their children's first teacher and the only teacher that remains with a child for a long period of time. Educators must discard the old deficit model of working with families and, instead, operate on an enrichment model founded on the belief that parents truly want the best for their children. Not only must educators tell parents that they are equally as important as the school, they must tell students how important their homes and communities are. Having a partnership allows educators to tap a rich source of cultural knowledge and personal experiences. Mexican American families want their children to succeed in school, and educators have an important responsibility to work with these students and their families.

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What Should Parents Know about Standardized Testing in Schools?

Parent Brochure

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation

One tool that schools use to learn about students is the standardized test. This brochure explains basic features of these tests and suggests questions you might ask your child's teacher about testing. Understanding the role of testing will help you to enable your child to succeed in school and to develop a better relationship between your family and your child's school.

What Are Standardized Tests?

Usually created by commercial test publishers, standardized tests are designed to give a common measure of students' performance. Because large numbers of students throughout the country take the same test, they give educators a common yardstick or "standard" of measure. Educators use these standardized tests to tell how well school programs are succeeding or to give themselves a picture of the skills and abilities of today's students.

Some popular tests include the California Achievement Tests (the CAT), the Stanford Achievement Test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (the ITBS), and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale.

Why Do Schools Use Standardized Tests?

Standardized tests can help teachers and administrators make decisions regarding the instructional program. They help schools measure how students in a given class, school, or school system perform in relation to other students who take the same test. Using the results from these tests, teachers and administrators can evaluate the school system, a school program, or a particular student.

How Do Schools Use Standardized Tests?

Different types of standardized tests have different purposes. Standardized achievement tests measure how much students have already learned about a school subject. The results from these tests can help teachers develop programs that suit students' achievement levels in each subject area, such as reading, math, language skills, spelling, or science.

Standardized aptitude tests measure students' abilities to learn in school-how well they are likely to do in future school work. Instead of measuring knowledge of subjects taught in school, these tests measure a broad range of abilities or skills that are considered important to success in school. They can measure verbal ability, mechanical ability, creativity, clerical ability, or reasoning. The results from aptitude tests help teachers to

plan instruction that is appropriate the students' levels. Educators most commonly use achievement and aptitude tests to:

--Evaluate school programs;
--Report on students' progress;
--Diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses;
--Select students for special programs;
--Place students in special groups; and
--Certify student achievement (for example, award high school diplomas or promote students from grade to grade).

Can Standardized Tests Alone Determine My Child's Placement in the Classroom?

No. Paper-and-pencil tests give teachers only part of the picture of your child's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers combine the results of many mehtods to gain insights into the skills, abilities, and knowledge of your child. These methods include:

--Observing students in the classroom;
--Evaluating their day-to-day classwork;
--Grading their homework assignments;
--Meeting with their parents; and
--Keeping close track of how students change or grow throughout the year.

Standardized tests have limitations. These tests are not perfect measures of what individual students can or cannot do or of everything students learn. Also, your child's scores on a particular test may vary from day to day, depending on whether your child guesses, receives clear directions, follows the directions carefully, takes the test seriuosly, and is comfortable in taking the test.

How Can I Help My Child Do Well on Tests?

Here are a few suggestions for parents who want to help their children do well on tests.

--First and most important, talk to your child's teacher often to monitor your child's progress and find out what activities you can do at home to help your child.

--Make sure your child does his or her homework.

--Make sure your child is well-rested and eats a well-rounded diet.

--Have a variety of books and magazines at home to encourage your child's curiosity.

--Don't be overly anxious about test scores, but encourage your child to take tests seriously.

--Don't judge your child on the basis of a simple test score.

What Should I Ask My Child's Teacher?

Before the test. . .

--Which tests will be administered during the school year and for what purposes?

--How will the teacher or the school use the results of the test?

--What other means of evaluation will the teacher or the school use to measure your child's performance?

--Should your child practice taking tests?

After the test. . .

--How do students in your child's school compare with students in other school systems in your state and across the country?

--What do the test results mean about your child's skills and abilities?

--Are the test results consistent with your child's performance in the classroom?

--Are any changes anticipated in your child's educational program?

--What can you do at home to help your child strengthen particular skills?

What Are My Legal Rights?

Several precedents and laws define legal rights related to taking tests in school:

--Under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, also known as the Buckley Amendment, your have a right to examine your child's academic records. If these records contain test scores, your have right to see those scores as well.

--Your child has a right to due process. For example, your child must get adequate notice when a test is required for high school graduation and adequate time to prepare for the test.

--Your child has a right to fair and equitable treatment. Schools cannot, for example, have different test score requirements based on gender or race.

Schools are not, however, necessarily liable for tests and test results being misused. Your child's best protection against the misuse of testing is for you to be knowledgeable about the appropriate uses of various types of tests. If you suspect your child is being tested inappropriately, or is not being tested when testing would be appropriate, talk with your child's teacher.

Where Can Parents Find Out More About Testing in Schools?

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ericae@ericae.net
http://ericae.net

National Center for Fair and Open Testing, Inc. (FairTest)
342 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 864-4810

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